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ECHOES

justice, peace and creation news

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FEATURING

Theology of Life

Echoes From Elsewhere

An Introduction To Echoes Magazine In Reactions, Facts and Issues From All Over The World

'Just help us,' children's network organiser tells churches

By Jerry L. Van Marter

Craig Kielburger, an innocent-looking adolescent from Toronto, Canada, knew nothing about child exploitation until he read a newspaper account about the murder in Pakistan of a 12-year-old carpet weaver who dared speak out about his own misery.

"He was the same age as me, and it was so terrible I just had to do something," Kielburger, now aged 13, told members of the World Council of Churches' Central Committee on 19 September.

So with a group of about 20 friends in Toronto, he started a child advocacy organisation, "Free the Children," that in less than a year has spread "all across the world."

Ashtha Tuladhar, a 15-year-old from Nepal, was also ignorant of the dangers facing the world's children until she agreed to attend a United Nations-sponsored meeting that brought together children from her country.

"It was students and street kids and prostitutes - we were all shocked at first," Tuladhar recounted. "But then we began to understand each other and, once we did, we knew we had to get organised."

With help from UNICEF (United Nations' International Children's Emergency Fund), Tuladhar and her new-found allies created Bal Chetana Samuha (Child Awareness Group), a children's rights group with networks of children throughout Nepal.

Now the WCC has joined the global effort to fight the abuse and exploitation of children world-wide. After establishing the rights of children as a WCC priority last year, the WCC hosted an "International Consultation on the Rights of Children" in May this year, in which Kielburger and Tuladhar participated.

The WCC has produced a booklet, *We Can Help Each Other* - based on the consultation - to assist member churches in their child advocacy efforts and to foster creation of a global child advocacy network.

"It is clear that churches can and should do more to respond ... to the dramatic situation affecting our children, taking care to address root causes," Drexel Gomez, of the Church of the Province of the West Indies, told the central committee. Gomez chairs the WCC committee spearheading the effort.

According to the booklet:

There are an estimated 100 million homeless street children world-wide under the age of 15;

One million children are forced into prostitution each year, with most of them contracting HIV/AIDS;

There is an 80 per cent mortality rate among children under the age of five born with AIDS;

An estimated 190 million children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition;

There are several million child slaves in the world;

At least 200 million children work full-time, mostly on farms in South Asia.

But increasingly, children - and adults who support them - are taking action to defend children. "It is very important that you know the incredible impact a number of organisations are having on this situation," Gomez told the central committee.

"We are very happy UNICEF has helped us, and we are very happy that the WCC is now willing to help as well," Tuladhar said. "It doesn't matter what religion or colour we are or you are," she added. "Just help us."

Kielburger agreed. "Believe in us, challenge us and please don't underestimate us," he said. "Our generation will surprise you."

(Reproduced from Ecumenical News International)

Development issues in South Africa

If you want to follow current ecumenical discussion on the difficult and complicated development in South Africa, you should get in touch with **EFSA, the Ecumenical Foundation of Southern Africa**, P.O. Box 2305, Bellville 7535, South Africa. In recent years they have organised major conferences and exhibitions on development issues, as well as commissioning and publishing studies and lectures. They have published, among others:

Renier Koegelenberg (ed), *The Reconstruction and Development Programme: The role of the Church, civil society and NGOs.*

Barney Pityana, *The Ecumenical Challenge for South Africa.*

Noko Frans Kekana, *Economic Justice on South Africa. Towards a prophetic theology of community solidarity, economic equity and pastoral care.*

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Editorial

Echoes
justice, peace and creation news

Echoes is an occasional publication of the World Council of Churches' Programme Unit III on Justice, Peace and Creation.
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by Bob Scott

A recent staff visit to some of the refugee camps in Goma, Zaire, brought a moving account of hardship, anxiety, vulnerability and, sometimes, hope. What a potential powder-keg that place is! What does family, or marriage relationships, or parent-children relationships mean in a place like that? How cheapened has life become? What is being created for the future?

Almost all the team visits to WCC member churches, as part of the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, speak of the economic burdens that women bear in rapidly changing economies; of the racism experienced especially by women and the high incidence of violence against women, including in the church environment itself. Based on this evidence, could we describe the modern church as a place in which violence against women is condoned?

What becomes of the beautiful islands of the Pacific, and the peoples who have their homes there, when we continue to ignore the pleas for action and increasing global warming will mean their homes will disappear under the sea?

How can we cope with the unfolding stories of the atrocities committed in the conflicts within former Yugoslavia? We knew they were happening; now we know the statistics and the human cost.

And there are also many moving stories, of new insights and new commitments. A colleague spoke of a meeting he attended in Argentina at which a middle class woman, who does social work with poor women and children, confessed that she had kept silent during the period of disappearances (the so-called "dirty war" in Argentina when thousands of people were abducted and murdered by the military). She said: "it is useless to apologise; but I promise I will never be silent again".

The challenges, the questions, the confusions and uncertainties seem never-ending. So many of them speak of death. Actual death, or death of the spirit, or death of the community or death of hope - which is almost the same as death itself.

There is a big search on. The search for LIFE. The recovery of the essence of creation; the wonder of things being new and hope abounding. Seeking new ways of understanding and acting. Probing our intentions and actions to find if they are in touch with the realities which surround us.

The Church which follows Jesus, who described himself as 'life', and which holds to a gospel of love, can do nothing other than engage in this constant search for life, even in the dark parts of our globe.

That is what the Theology of Life process is. The many case studies, undertaken in over twenty parts of the world, are not merely about theological or social discussions, or Christian biblical reflection. They are stories of exploration for life; for new ways of living and understanding, reflecting the realities and possibilities of our generation.

The Theology of Life process, within Unit III, was born out of the recognised need to have deeper discussion on ecclesiology and ethics. It is not so long ago that even those words, "ecclesiology and ethics", would have seemed too academic and marginalising to me. How could I presume to be involved in the debate about the influence church structures and social ethics should have on each other. That was for theologians and people in universities.

Not so now. I want to reclaim that ground for every person, young or old, female or man, Black or White, educated or not.

It is absolutely correct that these case studies, and the many, many discussions which have been sporned by them, as well as all the other consultations within the Theology of Life process, should be seen as part of the on-going debate on ecclesiology and ethics.

Yet I have heard people question this: why is this agenda being imposed on these church issues? Leave us to ponder the nature of the church and the moral responsibilities we have.

It is not possible. The two discussions go together, they are part of each other. Indeed the theology of life process can provide the agenda for the ecclesiology and ethics debate; offering a framework in which to conduct that discussion.

The stories you read in this issue of ECHOES will tell you a lot about the church, its structures and its spoken and unspoken creeds. They will also point us to what is actually happening in our world; asking questions but also attempting answers. That is why it is called the theology of life - for it is searching and it is hopeful.

THEOLOGY OF LIFE

Looking forward to Sokoni

by Martin Robra

I am looking forward to participating in the next Unit III Commission Meeting on January 12-19 in Nairobi, Kenya, because it is opening the way for an exciting event to take place, called "Sokoni". In choosing the Swahili word of traditional African markets, which served the community as places of communication and exchange, Unit III is underscoring that there are alternatives to the logic of the global economic and financial system.

Preparing for the Sokoni, the friends in Kenya are going to construct a big, open meeting hall surrounded by ten little huts. The huts offer space enough to exhibit textiles, posters or any other material to illustrate the results of twenty three Theology of Life case studies which were based on the ten Affirmations of the Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (Seoul, 1990). But not only representatives of the case studies and commissioners will be there. In and around the huts, groups who received loans from Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) or the Kenyan National Council of Churches' Programme on Small Scale Business, wood carvers and other artists will organize their Sokoni.

More than one hundred persons from Kenya will attend the meeting every day: representatives of the older generation who took part in the anti-colonial struggles, street children from Nairobi and other young people from all around the country, groups from South Sudan and others struggling for justice and peace in Kenya and women. The Sokoni will take root in the local context, but at the same time provide space for an inter-contextual dialogue on the destructive impact of the ongoing process of globalization on Earth community and to identify building blocks for a culture, ethic and spirituality of life and solidarity.

When Unit III embarked on the Theology of Life Programme, the renewal of ecumenical social thought and action was the stated goal. The programme was designed as an open process based in local experiences which could inspire and transform the work of the Unit. It was clear from the very beginning that the openness to learn and to be changed in a common journey is essential for the success or failure of the programme; that there is no renewal without transformation.

But nevertheless, it was a moving moment when the Executive Group, which represents the Commission, took the decision to depart from the usual pattern of a Commission meeting, sharing the space with others, opening itself to the dynamic energies generated in the process and making itself vulnerable. It should not be hidden, however, that it needed the tears of women to finally overcome the anxiety to loose control about the process and open the door for the unexpected presence of the Spirit in taking this decision.

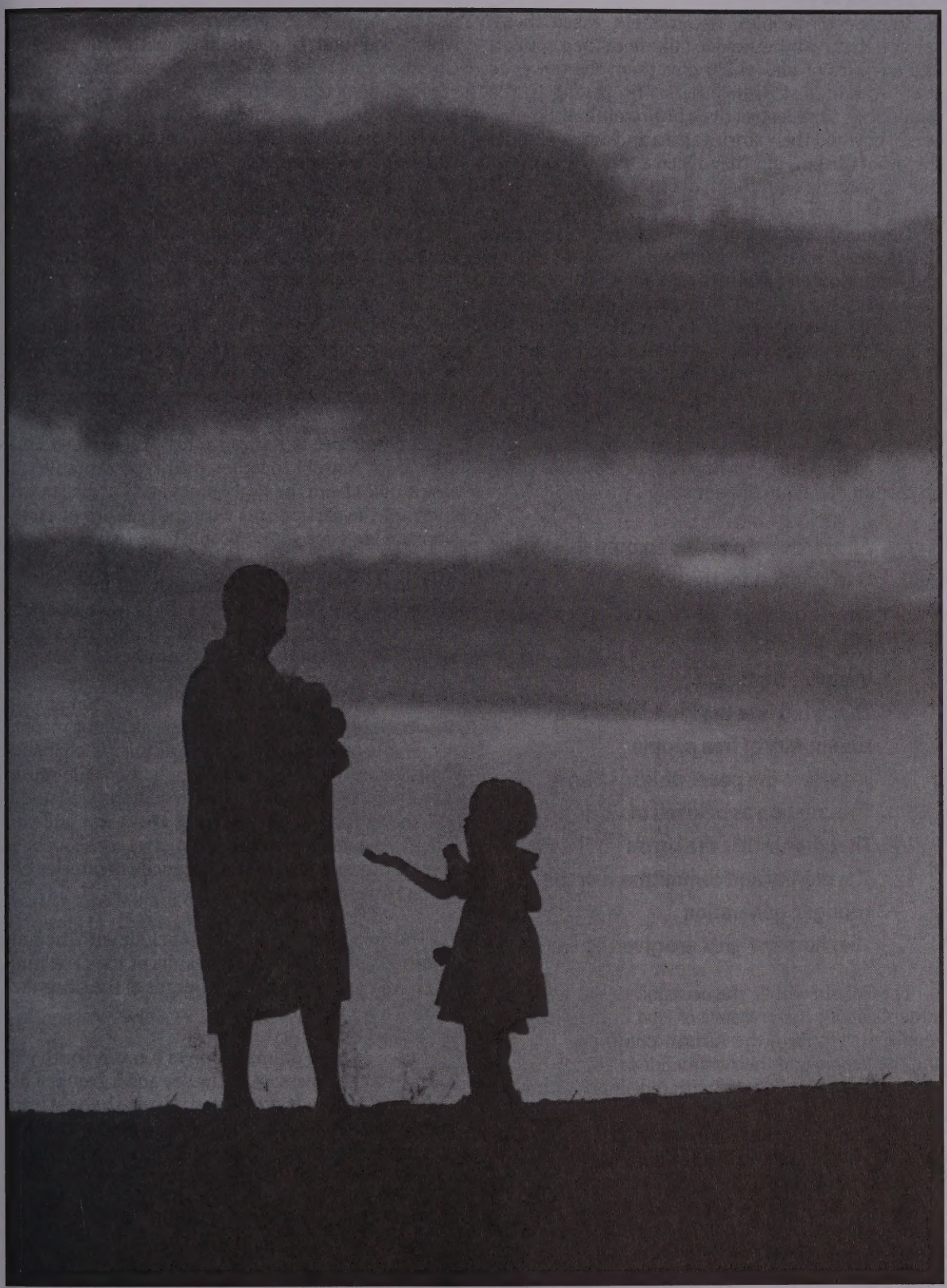


Photo by J. Liebenberg

Soon after the journey of the Theology of Life Programme began in May 1994, three basic questions to guide the process were identified:

- What do we want to share?
- How do we want to share so that others will understand?
- How to receive what is shared?

Indigenous peoples, for example, asked themselves if they really wanted to talk about their sources and energies of life, which give them the power to survive and resist, with others who belong to the dominating and destructive culture of their oppressors. They told their stories again and again. But did the others listen, did they receive the precious gift that was shared with them, did they change?

Obviously, the last of the three questions mentioned above is crucial in a process of inter-cultural and inter-contextual exchange when participants have to face the realities of unjust and destructive relationships and massive exclusion. How to prepare yourself that you are ready to receive and to change? The Executive Group took the lesson seriously.

The Theology of Life Programme began with a study on the history of ecumenical social thought and action and then led to twenty three case studies based on the ten Seoul Affirmations:

I. All exercise of power is accountable to God
II. God's option for the poor
III. The equal value of all races and peoples
IV. That male and female are created in the image of God
V. That truth is at the foundation of a community of free people
VI. We affirm the peace of Jesus Christ
VII. The creation as beloved of God
VIII. That the earth is the Lord's
IX. The dignity and commitment of the younger generation
X. That human rights are given by God

The Sokoni will be the occasion to share life testaments about the presence of God in the life of the people. Celebrating the African continent, the soil and the people and their tremendous energy to survive, the process will begin with reflections on power, receiving the results of three African case studies on Affirmation I (Kenya, Malawi, South Africa) and move on to stories of life and death; stories remembering the martyrs, who gave their lives for the struggles for justice, peace and creation, and stories of just and sustainable communities. There are other ways to organize societies than to paralyze the hope of the people and introduce politics of exclusion and despair. Those powers of death and opression teach that there is no alternative. But life never has just one option.

Case studies of Indigenous Peoples on Affirmations VII and VIII will help to see the relationship between the destruction of the environment and the story of the dominating culture of the North which was and is intertwined with the story of Christendom, mission and theologies. Calling for the recognition of their land rights and the gospels given to them, Indigenous Peoples unmask the unholy Oikoumene of domination, a term coined by the Argentinian ecumenist J. Miguez-Bonino. What is at stake is not just the development of more coherent theologies of creation but the fundamental transformation of the culture of domination, if this is possible at all. It probably needs even more than that: the death of the old and the resurrection into something new, a process of re-birthing which is impossible without faith, without utopia generating hope, without a vision of a culture of life and solidarity recognizing otherness and otherkind, a vision of the ecumenical earth.

The presence of Kenyan youth and of street children from Nairobi together with representatives of case studies from the Philippines and Caribbean will confront the participants with the realities of exclusion and violence young people have to face.

Groups from South Sudan will tell their stories of the presence of God in the midst of war and death, about their longing for peace and the initiatives taken by the New Sudan Council of Churches.

The contributions from case studies on Affirmations II and III will also speak about mechanisms of exclusion, racism and ethnicity, challenging the churches and their complicity, while representatives of case studies on Affirmations V, VI and X will share their results speaking about war and violence in their societies, the destructive consequences of impunity and the need to reconcile memories not hiding, but revealing the truth.

The process of sharing will conclude with the contributions of women on the results of the case studies on Affirmation IV and the Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women.

Every night, a drama group of Kenyan youth will summarize the message of the day and a group of listeners will share what they have heard to harvest from the process and to discuss consequences for programmatic work on justice, peace, creation whether there will be a Unit III in the future structure of the World Council of Churches or not. It is likely to happen that, perhaps even before the Harare Assembly, the WCC will undergo a major restructuring. Taking this into consideration, the decision not to hold a Commission meeting as usual, but to provide space for an encounter of theologies of life and a celebration of life was not only timely it was, itself, an affirmation of life.

Martin Robra is executive secretary in Unit III.

Theology of Life : An Australian case study

"We affirm that male and female are created in the image of God"

Nonie Wales reports on her visit to Brazil which was part of a mutual exchange programme

The opening session on the first day was a clear claiming of our space together as women. Women of different backgrounds: Afro-Brazilian, Gypsy, White, poor, middle-class, some housemaids,some academics, some student. There was a sense for me of anticipation, trepidation and excitement all at once, knowing that together this group of women would share their lives, vision and experience of God.

It takes courage for women to dare to touch the image of God. Because in doing so, we acknowledge our own worthiness to be intimately connected to God, which is a scary thing for women who have always been made to feel unworthy. And we are opening ourselves up to new revelations about God which can be both joyous and painful at the same time.

At the opening of the Conference, Sylvia explained that we were gathered to dismantle old images of God, to encounter each other and recover the revolutionary memory of women in theology. This was done carefully, with respect for each other, for God and the integrity of our theology. Each day we met in small groups, with the aim of processing the input and together theologically reflecting on our own lives in light of the ideas presented to us. This was a very empowering model of "doing theology". It meant that all participants were acknowledged as theologians in their own lives. Our stories were the window to God

We will very carefully dare to touch the image of God.

(Sylvia)

The Annunciation by Christina Yambeing

We will share the secrets of women who have been filled by God, preached about God and not always been accepted.

(Sylvia)

and the collage of new and old images began to grow.

The first day focused on the experiences of women, and the development of feminist and Black feminist theology in Latin America. Sylvia's address especially touched me. Some of what she offered to the conference is paraphrased below:

"Black feminist theology refers to different realities and experiences of faith. Black theology is an ancestral theology of thousands of years. Our past memory is very rich and dense. We contemplate on this memory of our ancestors who have had to keep this secret as a treasure, for there were many moments when they could not share.

"The concept of Western theology is written production, doctrines. But this is a more recent theology. For Black theology we have different codes: food, dance, drums.

"Black feminist theology begins with the exclusiveness of racism and sexism. We undertake our identity as Black women, recovering memory and religion and holding a critical view of traditional Western theology. We recognise there are different forms of revealing God, and we are open to the struggles of other impoverished groups.

"In finding our new theologians, we find ourselves at a table to which we are not invited, asking questions, bringing threats and different feelings. The table is

"Realising Emptiness, by Helen the Printer"

for a party, not discussions, but laden with food, celebration, stories. This theology is going to make us fat! Bodies of older, younger, deformed, tired, sensual bellies with birth marks and scars. These bodies talk theology. They are the bodies of people who have lost their lives. Bodies marked by the story of slavery, remaining in the past, used and abused. Sometimes they do not have a word for themselves but need one from the Other.

"A 'theology of the body' is about recreating ourselves, needing to give birth to ourselves. A resurrection of the body, exorcising guilt of being woman, Black, enjoying pleasure, sexual pleasure. We need to make of the Divinity a companion and accomplice of our history. We must overcome the separation of sky and hell, Creator and Created.

"A theology of Latin America is looking for inclusiveness, diversity and Carnival, party! In our bodies and minds we remember many parties, such as the wedding in Cana and transforming water into wine. The sign of a new time and era, water needs to be touched and formed into new life. We want water to quench our own thirst and that of our children. When we transform water into wine, theology is within this moment, it is in the party."

We didn't just talk about a theology of the body and the importance of partying. We did it! The centrality of the spirit of Carnival in the lives of Brazilian people was quickly apparent. Music and dancing, drums and rhythm were always present amongst us. We feasted at night, we celebrated Eucharist with dance and laughter. We lived, breathed and tasted our theology.

Our stories are windows into God, the nature of God. Our lives are the tools to our reflecting on and better understanding God.

(Davina)

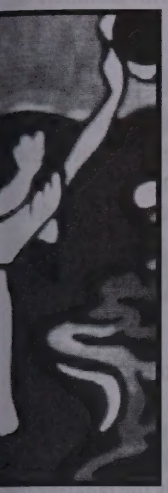
Davina and Nonie ran a workshop one afternoon for the *Theology of Life*. We asked women to share their images of God and began by miming our own changing images, using visual language so as to overcome the verbal barriers. When the other women were asked to share, they began by telling their life-stories. Their narratives expressed their relationship with God and the changing reality of this relationship. Through the stories, we heard of women taking control of their lives and spirituality no longer being dictated to by the church.

We heard from a White woman who was brought up in a rich home with little love. She had always wanted to become a nun but her family wanted children so would not allow it. For many years she struggled and felt distant from God, but now she is a part of a base Christian community, is living with the poor and has discovered the face of God there. An Afro-Brazilian woman shared of her life growing up in poverty but with much love and support from her family. She felt very ashamed of her colour for many years, until more recently she has discovered pride in her Black identity. We heard a poem about the pain of separating from family to enter a convent, but also the joy of fulfilling a life-long yearning to be with God.

At first Davina and Nonie were anxious that the women were not focusing on the question. We wanted to hear about the image of God! It was only at the end that we realised that for these women God is so grounded in their own self-discovery and journey that Her image is inseparable from their reality.

Davina said: "They will never put our stories together as they have been in the Bible, but our stories are the same. Stories of communities and individual struggling with oppression, slavery, seeking freedom and a liberating God." Indeed, that afternoon I was honoured to look through a window and see our God with tears of grief and joy on Her face.

EPILOGUE



Whoever said I can't fly?
Why, Sisters, I can - can't I?
Whoever said, that because I'm a girl,
I'd be moulded and scolded by a sexist world.
Told me I could only be a mother,
Said I could never do things like my brother.
Well, here's mud in your eye,
'Cause Sisters, I can - can't I?
Why, Sisters, You told me, I could be free,
Showed me I could be, what I wanted to be,
Told me that I could liberate myself,
That I need never be left on the shelf.
Why, I can spread my wings and fly away,
From the depths, to the heights any night, any day.
Why, the whole wide world is within my reach,
I can learn or I can teach,
Why, I can dig ditches or write professorial theses,
'Cause me - why, I'm the female of the species.

And I've rewritten the story of the power and glory,
The wonder of being, the joy of seeing,
In every direction, my reflection,
In a million women's faces,
And I've found my place in a million different places,
For a human being, the female version.
And you know what?
It couldn't have happened to a nicer person,
'Cause I like what I see, when I look at me,
And I don't have to be, what I used to be,
I can be whatever I choose to be.
So you can throw out the book on your sexist theses,
'Cause me - why, I'm the female of the species.

Maureen Watson

Maureen Watson, *Female of the Species*, Inside Black Australia: An anthology of Aboriginal Poetry, ed. Kevin Gilbert, Penguin Books, Melbourne, Victoria, 1988.

Lament for Women Recovering from Abuse in Childhood

A central table is set with one lit red candle, to symbolise the abuse on childhood plus a number of unlit, green candles, to symbolise healing and new growth. There is a vase of flowers, a basket with dead flower heads and a bowl with incense which is lit before the start of the liturgy.

We are Women who grieve.
We have been broken, we have been despised,
we have been torn apart, we have been shattered.
We grieve for the childhood taken from us by our possessors, our tormentors.
We grieve for the past we were forced to have,
for the future we did not have,
for the image of a beautiful body denied to us:
the Image of God as Goddess, as Mother and Daughter and Girl- Child.
Instead feeling we need to cover ourselves with the ugliness of the image we have formed, the image of the horror of abuse.
We grieve, we weep, we wail,
we beat our fists on our breasts and upon the floor,
we cover our heads with the ashes of our pasts,
and wear the sack-cloth of the image of ourselves.

Reading: adapted from Isaiah 33-54:5

Woman was despised and rejected by men,
a woman of sorrows and acquainted with grief
she was despised and they esteemed her not.

Surely she has borne his griefs and carried his sorrows
yet they esteemed her stricken by God and afflicted,
she was wounded for his transgressions
bruised for his iniquities...
who has laid upon her the iniquity of these men?

She was oppressed and was afflicted,
yet opened not her mouth;
like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so she opened not her mouth.
By oppression and shame she was taken away,
stricken for the transgression of men.

Was it the will of the Lord to bruise her and grieve her?
Shall she break forth into singing?
Shall she enlarge the place of her tent to be spread abroad to the right and to the left?
Shall she not hear, not be ashamed,
shall she forget the shame of her youth, her reproach?

Prayer of Intercession

God of life and death, we call on you.
Suffering God, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We call on you because for so many it is a long time between the "death" - from abuse in our childhood and the promise of life as women. Despair threatens to overtake hope, God's delight seems like cruel fiction. Bless us again with glimmers of the truth of hope.
Sister God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We call on you because for many the way of salvation is obscured by disgrace - disgrace that is reinforced by society, the church, and the voice of disgrace itself, shame.
O Jesus, put your finger under the chins of shamed faces, gently lift them until your loving countenance smiles away the tears.
Brother God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We call on you because for too many the constraints of life cling so tightly... there seems no way out, they choke and smother. The wrapping we have placed on the remnants of ourselves deceive, convincing all that they are the true identity of the one they "protect". O Jesus, unwrap gently the bondage of the past, breathe your life gently into the corpse within, transforming, restoring, freeing...
Life-giving God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We call on you because when we escape the familiarity and safety of the past, we fear the reality of the present. Sometimes it is easier to retreat into the past. Weakness and doubt confuse. Like eaglets learning to fly we mistrust the wisdom of renouncing the familiarity of the nest for the unseen force of the wind carrying us to heights never before imagined. O Jesus, lift, by the warmth of your presence, the wings still discovering flight ... lift until they find their home is truly in you.
Strong God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We call on you to continue your healing work in us, help us become the fullness of our bodies and of ourselves.
Living God, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

We ask these things in the name of the Christ, who suffered, and who knows our pain.
Amen.

Meditation: *Women are asked to remember in silence their childhood, the abuse they have endured and to speak about this if they wish. In turn they may take a dead flower head out of the basket and place it in the bowl with incense. As it burns, the smoke rises to symbolise her lament, the grief of the abuse and her hope for herself as a Woman growing towards wholeness. To symbolise healing a green candle may be lit from the red one. This candle is taken home after the liturgy.*

Nonie Wales works for the Uniting Church in Australia and is coordinator of the Theology of Life case study in Australia.
The pictures we have used to illustrate this case study are taken from the original report.

A letter from Te Rua Winiata from Aotearoa New Zealand, Unit III Commissioner

Her response after attending the Creation Forum of Theology of Life in Guatemala, May 1996

This was a Creation Forum. This was the opportunity to share our stories, our understandings of origin and the reality of being. As I listened in the Circle I heard many unwritten parables. It was energising to speak and be understood; to listen and to know. There was no need to analyse or fragment each others stories and for me that was empowering.

There was a tentativeness at the beginning but in recognising the importance of these few days together we attended to that cautiousness and gave ourselves the space to find the positive strength which was our gift to each other.

From the beginning, we were able to let glimpses of our realities and hopes penetrate the cloak that covers the scars of struggle and oppression. Little by little we began to tell our stories.

This was not storytelling to strangers. These were not stories that were alien to us. We heard, we knew, and the fragile threads that bound us together as Indigenous People were strengthened.

The agenda, timetable and programme were ours to choose, as were the themes.

From the shared ideas we wanted to ask:

- What is the purpose of God for Life?
- We wanted to share our Creation Stories.
- We wanted to talk about humankind - land, the environment and ecology
- We asked what is Christian Commitment?
- What do we have to say about Gospel and Culture?

I was surprised how soon a pivotal question arose on the issue of Gospel and Culture, and how often it featured in conversation. It came mainly in the form of: Can I be of my Indigenous People and Christian?

For some the answer was simply "yes" or "no". For others it remains a confusing and even frustrating question. I asked myself why; it seemed people had doubts about the value or worth of traditions that the Creator gave us.

Who has put this question into our minds? Is it our question or is it part of the colonising package?

We talked about our understanding of Gospel. We remembered that the Gospel always was, from the beginning. It wasn't necessarily something brought by missionaries. It was Good News. Yet sometimes the reality had been a Gospel not of good news and life but a Gospel of death. For with it has come a gospel of dying, a gospel of oppression, a gospel of loss.

Perhaps this was behind the urgency of the question about gospel and culture. I felt a turning point. As we looked at the question face to face it was a time to challenge it and begin to leave it behind.

We asked ourselves if being Christian meant that we must take on the culture of the colonisers and all who have oppressed us as *people of the land*. We began to dig deeper: before the time when Christianity was used as a political tool to oppress. We thought of the time when the early Christians tried to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The time before Christianity became a tool of the state - before Constantine.

In remembering that, the original question of 'can I be Christian and Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand or ...' became for me: *How does the Gospel enhance all that I am as Maori? What does it enable me to leave behind, from my own culture, that which is oppressive? How does it enable me to belong to the land as the Creator intended?*

In moving forward I allow myself to move away from oppression, and being the victim, to freedom. And that freedom enables me to see that there is a message for each one of us being born into the time and place where we now find ourselves.

The Creation Forum was a connecting point. Gospel is about relationships. We have been given understandings of the wholeness of relationships - with each other, with Mother Earth and the whole of Creation.

This is our Gospel - this is what Christ also knew and came to share. The oppression and victimisation, the genocide and ethnocide of Indigenous Peoples by colonisers was not the intended message of the Creator. In reclaiming the original message we can reconnect with Creation.

Indigenous People's Declaration: Respecting Creation

By the grace of the Creator and guided by our ancestors, we, Indigenous Peoples from around the world are gathered at Ciudad Guatemala.

We are from Meso America: Quiche, Kekchi, Cakchiquel, Kanjobal, South America: Aymara of Bolivia, North America: Cherokee, Lakota, Quapaw, Muscogee, Seneca, the Pacific: Samoans from Samoa and Maori of Aotearoa, and Europe: Sami from Norway.

We have come to share our experiences of life and our place in creation.

We declare that, despite various forms of genocide and ethnocide directed at us, we survive to walk upon Mother Earth caring for Creation.

We call upon the world to acknowledge that our condition continues to be threatened in the presence of global sickness afflicting our Mother and killing her children.

The global community must cease its suicidal behaviour and be reborn to its faith traditions that demand accountability to the Creator and Creation. Such a rebirth will significantly alter life as we now know it.

A small percentage of the population, in its relentless pursuit of profit at all cost, has lived a religion of greed and exploitation. This has subverted the Creator's original instructions, throwing Creation into imbalance, consequently corrupting economies and political systems, driving people from their lands, polluting and disrupting the environment upon which all life depends.

The weight of this declaration now rests heavily upon world political, ecclesiastical and spiritual leaders to summon civil and religious societies to a true commitment to build societies based on just and sustainable communities, secure land tenure for all peoples, and ecological balance.

Only in this way will harmony be restored to Creation and a future ensured for generations to come.

Guatemala 17 May 1996

Declaración de pueblos indígenas: Respetando la creación

Por la gracia del creador y la guianza de nuestros ancestros, nosotros, pueblos indígenas de alrededor del mundo, nos reunimos en la ciudad de Guatemala.

Nosotros somos de Meso América: Quiché, Kekchí, Cakchiquel, Kanjobal, de Sur América: Aymaras de Bolivia, Norte América: Cherokee, Lakota, Quapaw, Muscogee, Seneca, del Pacífico: Samoan de Samoa y Maori de Aotearoa, de Europa: Sami de Noruega.

Nosotros hemos venido aquí para compartir nuestras experiencias de vida y nuestro lugar en la Creación.

Declaramos que, a pesar de varias formas de genocidio y etnocidio dirigido hacia nosotros, sobrevivimos y caminamos sobre nuestra Madre Tierra, cuidando la Creación.

Hacemos un llamado al mundo para que se den cuenta que nuestra condición continua siendo amenazada por la enfermedad global la cual esta afligiendo a nuestra Madre Tierra y matando a sus hijos.

La comunidad global debe cesar su comportamiento suicida y renacer a sus tradiciones de fe que demanda responsabilidad hacia el Creador y la Creación. Tal renacimiento cambiara significativamente el sistema de vida que por ahora conocemos.

Un pequeño porcentaje de la población están afanados en lograr a todo costo, en vivir una religión de avaricia y explotación que ha distorsionado las enseñanzas originales del Creador, llevando a la Creación a un desequilibrio, consecuente de economías y sistemas políticos de muerte, sacando a la gente de sus tierras, contaminando y alterando el medio ambiente del cual depende la vida.

El peso de esta declaración recae grandemente sobre las estructuras y líderes políticos, eclesiales y espirituales a convocar a las sociedades civiles y religiosas a un compromiso verdadero para construir sociedades basadas en justicia y sostenibilidad, asegurando la tenencia de la tierra para todos los pueblos y tener un equilibrio ecológico. Únicamente, de esta manera será restaurada la armonía de la Creación y aseguraremos un futuro para las generaciones que vendrán.

Guatemala 17 Mayo 1996

Illustration taken from "Hauora Maori Standards of Health" A study by Department of Health, Aotearoa / New Zealand

Teología de la vida: Estudio de caso en Guatemala

La creación como Amada por Dios

Este estudio de caso es fruto de todo un proceso de largo tiempo. Mucho de lo que aquí se expone viene de la vivencia misma de los pueblos Kanjobales, Kekchís, Quichés, Lacandones, Kapchikeles y de los Itzaes, todos pertenecientes a la legendaria cultura Maya.

Los Mayas tienen un concepto diferente de la creación del mundo en comparación a la formación de la creación según los Cristianos. Posiblemente entonces se haga un poco difícil entender lo que se ha recogido, pero dice exactamente lo que la gente cree, practica y celebra.

Los científicos han expuesto que los habitantes de Abya Yala vinieron del otro lado del mundo a través del estrecho de Bering, pero para el Maya no hay tal teoría, sino que como tales su formación se dió desde estas mismas tierras. Por lo tanto no tienen procedencia de ningún otro lado.

Los invasores de hace 500 años trataron por todos los medios de demostrar que los Mayas, Aztecas e incas eran politeístas y demás. Hasta tal cuenta que Diego del Anda quemó el archivo de los Mayas en Yucatán con una duración de tres días completos, pretendiendo con ello borrar de la mente de los Mayas el cosmosentimiento de los habitantes. No lograron su objetivo puesto que por la íntima relación que hay entre los Mayas y la tierra y las demás criaturas fue fácil seguir con el mismo sentir y celebración, haciéndolo desde lugares inaccesibles. Los Españoles entendían la evangelización como algo teórico y pactado, mientras que para el Maya la evangelización no es cuestión de teoría ni firma de pactos sino más bien la misma practica, la relación fraternal entre hermanos. Podemos entender entonces que la vida de los Mayas era una vida evangélica aunque sin este nombre. Actualmente los Mayas no sienten mucha pasión por un evangelio teórico sino más bien por algo que esté lleno de solidaridad, fraternidad

y respeto en todo sentido.

La mayoría de los Mayas que se han hecho Cristianos no pueden entender ninguna otra teología si no entienden primero el valor de su propia cosmovisión y su propio cosmosentimiento. Es decir, no se puede ser un buen Cristiano si no se mantiene la teología Maya, porque sólo desde esta perspectiva tiene sentido y mensaje el Cristianismo.

En este trabajo entonces entenderemos mejor la relación entre Dios y las personas, las personas y Dios, pero además se da a conocer el hermanamiento de todo lo creado y la armonía intrínseca con que se relacionan.

El espíritu del Cielo y de la Tierra

Erróneamente por muchos años se ha conocido por Corazón del Cielo y de la Tierra porque se ha pretendido acercar a la realidad de lo que esto realmente significa; en Quiché U C'ux Kaj Uleu es realmente el epicentro de todo lo creado, es el espíritu generador de todo lo que existe, es el eje que a su alrededor giran todas las criaturas.

El Espíritu del Cielo y de la Tierra no son dos personas sino una sola persona, con manifestaciones y funciones diferentes, pero tienen el control de todo lo existente. La tierra en la cosmovisión Maya es precisamente el lugar donde se cultiva, se vive y se interrelaciona con los demás. Mientras que el cielo es todo lo que esta fuera del control de la persona y es otra fuerza la que controla este aspecto.

En la vivencia Maya el U C'ux Caj Uleu siempre es hombre-mujer. No puede ser solo hombre ni puede ser solamente mujer. En las manifestaciones diarias de este Ser Supremo: de día se manifiesta todo lo que se atribuye a un ser masculino y de noche a lo de un ser femenino. Los agricultores, por ejemplo, siempre esperan la germinación y la salida del maíz de noche y nunca de día. Es este pues el equilibrio que se hace sentir en el mundo actual. De no ser así, el mundo estaría desequilibrado como sucede con las sociedades que creen en un Dios machista.

Cada sub-cultura Maya tiene pequeñas variantes de la concepción de la formación del universo aunque casi todas coinciden con lo que expresa generalmente el Pop Wuj*. Este libro con influencias ya Cristianas mantiene todavía mucho de lo que nuestros antepasados practicaron y creyeron, pero también actualmente muchas de estas concepciones son sentidas y practicadas.

La co-responsabilidad entre las criaturas

En el cosmosentimiento Indio no hay diferencia de jerarquía de una criatura con otra, siempre nos somos útiles los unos a los otros, aunque la mayor respetabilidad se da al maíz. No es posible ver tirado un grano de maíz sin ser levantado, no existe la idea de dejar un grano de maíz en el suelo si no es para la siembra y la expresión común es "el santo maíz". Actualmente no es rentable en Guatemala sembrar maíz, al contrario produce perdidas, pero no sembrar maíz es falta de compromiso con el creador y con el maíz.

La madre tierra

La tierra para toda persona Maya es sagrada por ser la madre que nos da el sustento cotidiano y en quien convivimos con las otras criaturas que aprovechamos de la misma, porlo tanto hay que alimentarla, respetarla, cuidarla, sostenerla y protegerla. La alimentamos cuando todo lo que ella misma produce se le devuelve. Las plantas secas, las hojas de maíz, la brosa y todo lo que es bueno para la tierra hay que dárselo. El respeto a la tierra es casi obligatorio: cuando construimos primero hay que pedirle permiso a la tierra para hacer la construcción, cuando sembramos con azadón, machete o serbatana se necesita pedirle permiso. Regularmente se hace esta oración u otra similar: "¡O dios, Padre Mío, Madre Mía, señor de los montes y los valles, espíritu de la selva, trátame bien! Voy a hacer como siempre he hecho. Voy a hacerte mi ofrenda, para que sepas que voy a molestar tu corazón. Permítelo. Voy a mancillarte (a destruir tu belleza), a labrarte para poder vivir. No permitas que ningún animal me persiga; que no me pique ninguna serpiente, alacrán, avispa. No permitas que me caiga encima un árbol, ni que me corte una hacha o machete. Con todo mi corazón voy a labrarte!".

La tierra es considerada como criatura de Dios que tiene vida, porque de no ser así no generaría vida a todas las plantas ni daría cobertura a los humanos. Solo entendiendo que la tierra tiene vida es como se le guarda el debido respeto.

El rayo

Es respetado por toda su contribución a la germinación de la semillas. Es espiritual puesto que no tiene cuerpo y no puede morir. Se cree que viene de la presencia de Dios, y por lo tanto debe guardarsele mucho respeto. Prácticamente el rayo es el símbolo de la fertilidad porque cuando truena empieza a llover. En la cultura Kanjobal, se cree que el trueno es un enviado del Ser Supremo que está ordenando la lluvia para la siembra. Puede también caer un rayo en una piedra para el bien siempre de la persona, puesto que la piedra es considerada en la cultura Kanjobal como el esqueleto de la tierra y los ríos como la sangre de la misma.

La luna

Es considerada como la abuela de la tierra y como tal debe ser respetada porque además tiene efectos en la propia naturaleza y en la vida de todos nosotros. Cuando la luna es tierna produce debilidad, enfermedad y muchas veces dolor en la vida de todas las demás criaturas. No es bueno cortar árboles para madera cuando la luna es nueva, porque produce inestabilidad en la madera y produce problemas ya cuando la construcción esta hecha. Todo esto sucede

por no respetar a la luna y sus efectos, por lo tanto hay que saber la relación que existe entre ella y nosotros.

Las plantas

También a los pequeños se les enseña como deben comportarse con las plantas que nos rodean. Se les enseña a los niños en forma práctica como pueden ser útiles las plantas para nosotros. Por ejemplo en la cultura Quiché, hay muchas maneras de usar las flores, las plantas, las raíces, las semillas y los frutos para preservar la salud. En primer lugar purifican el ambiente proporcionándonos más oxígeno y sirven como medicina: el pino cura la tuberculosis, el ciprés las infecciones de la garganta y la amigdalitis, el nogal cura la diabetes, el encino nos da calcio, el eucalipto desinflama los bronquios y la sinusitis, la pepita de aguacate combate la amebiasis, la almendra alivia la diabetes, la trementina del pino se usa como yeso en fracturas como también cura la tos. Esto sirve precisamente para entender el respeto que se le debe de tener a las plantas.

El problema de la humanidad no es no conseguir beneficio de lo que ha creado el Ser Supremo, sino que, es la persona la que a descuidado su parte en la armonía de la creación. Por lo tanto el Maya esta tremendamente preocupado por la falta de respeto ante lo creado.

Los animales

Ayudan al hombre no sólo para proporcionar alimentos sino que colaboran en que la persona interpreta las señales de los tiempos, por ejemplo: cuando las aves miran hacia los cielos es que llueve con seguridad, cuando los gallos cantan en horas no acostumbradas están previniendo para tener cuidado antes de un desastre. Los animales son ejemplo para las personas en cuanto a sobrevivencia se refiere, inspiran y transmiten alegría. Según el Pop Wuj la función de los animales está bien establecida "de una vez idearon los animales de las montañas, los guardianes de las selvas, los moradores de las montañas, venados, pájaros, tigres, leones, serpientes, cascable, cantí, bejuquillo". Se cree que a mediados de año pueden cazar animales venados y otros animales salvajes que bajan de las montañas, pues piensan que el Ser Supremo permite que desciendan a ellos para que los puedan cazar y alimentarse.

Aves

Las aves merecen mucho respeto porque también contribuyen al bienestar de todo lo creado. En la cultura Kekchí siempre se pide permiso al Ser Supremo o a Tz'ultak'a (cerros) para que al salir a cazar animales para la alimentación en tiempo de siembra y cosecha (para cientos de personas), sea fructifera y poder regresar sin ninguna novedad. Que no se regrese con culebras y que los perros regresen sanos y salvos. En la cultura Kanjobal también está permitido comer las aves y otros animales de la montaña pero siempre se hace con permiso del Ser Supremo. En estas culturas es intolerable matar a los pájaros o a los animales no desarrollados todavía y nunca jamás se hace la cacería para lucrar con ella y mucho menos por deporte.

El maíz

La planta del maíz llamada milpa es protegida desde su germinación, ya que desde la siembra y basado en el calendario Maya se hace toda una fiesta en donde participan indispensablemente las mujeres. Inclusive hay más esperanza en cosechar buena tierra cuando son las mujeres las que seleccionan las semillas. Cuando las plantas ya están del tamaño de un metro se siembran toda clase de leguminosas para formar las barreras vivas. También al maíz hay que protegerlo de elementos del mal que pretenden no dar alimento al ser humano absorbiendo estos seres (hongos y plagas) los nutrientes del maíz para dar buen fruto. Hay hierbas con sabia y flor que protegen a la milpa de estos hongos y se deben sembrar alrededor de los cultivos. En la cultura Kanjobal se siembra el maíz basado en el calendario Maya. Se pone la semilla encima de una mesa y se entrega al U C'ux Uleu para que los proteja y den buen fruto, y luego se llevan en una canasta para el campo. Este trabajo de la siembra se hace en forma comunitaria, pues se invita a todos los vecinos para que juntos siembren el maíz del vecino. Antes de dar un machetazo, un azadonazo en la tierra para calzar la milpa se pide permiso porque con esta acción se está lastimando la tierra.

Las personas

Según la cultura Kanjobal, cuando la señora está embarazada no le permiten salir porque representa para ella mucho peligro y porque en su vientre se encuentra un nuevo ser que es voluntad del Creador. Regularmente se queda en la casa y es visitada por muchos vecinos y no sale a la calle para evitar las malas sombras y los malos espíritus. Cuando el niño nace se hace una fiesta con toda la familia, hermanos, cuñados, suegros, primos; todos son invitados y se hace una comida especial para el almuerzo. Los invitados llevan regalos par el nuevo ser: pañales, machetes, pollitos, otros llevan un plato, un vaso, un cuchillo, etc. La mamá tiene que estar en cama veinte días y diariamente se baña en "chuj" (baño de vapor) que se llama temascal. La señora toma diariamente medicina; entre las mejores se encuentra el apasote para restablecerse lo más pronto. A los viente días invitan otra vez a los familiares para hacer un desayuno especial. Sacan al bebé para dar

cuatro vueltas alrededor de la casa cargado por niños de trece o catorce años de edad y acompañado por otros niños llevando consigo perros, ovejas, gatos, pollos y otros animales. Al finalizar sale el abuelo y la abuela para recibir al bebé de manos de quien lo lleva cargado. Al llegar el bebé a la cocina su nombre es grabado en el centro de grandes tortillas de maíz que en ese momento se están preparando para cocer. Como símbolo de que es persona de maíz quitan un pedazo de la tortilla para ponerlo en el labio del bebé. Después de este acto todos pueden felicitar al bebé abrazándolo y juntos desayunan. A los cuarenta días se hace otra fiesta igual pero patrocinada por los padrinos y es cuando al bebé varón se le corta el cabello. A partir de este tiempo la responsabilidad es del padre para su educación oral y cuando llega a la edad de 4 años se le lleva al lugar de las siembras para enseñarle con juguetes la forma de sembrar el maíz.

En todo lo que hemos narrado, la ayuda mutua entre animales, personas, plantas, aves, la luna y la tierra es indiscutible y ninguno puede sobrevivir sin la ayuda del otro. La vida del Maya es eminentemente espiritual. No hay ningún momento en que uno pueda aislarse de los demás ni mucho menos del U C'ux Caj Uleu. Los que practican la religión Cristiana, que los obliga a vivir una vida espiritual y otra material, viven atormentados en una dualidad; esta es la fuente de duda de todo Maya Cristiano.

Por el respeto que merecen todas las criaturas que benefician tanto a la humanidad, la ropa de la mujer y del hombre Maya (desaparecido en muchas regiones de la cultura), representan siempre la armonía entre la persona y lo que está a su alrededor. Por ejemplo los güipiles (blusas) exteriorizan todo el sentir del cosmos y el respeto que de El se guarda. El cuello del güipil siempre es cuadrado y simboliza los cuatro puntos cardinales del universo, representando el respeto que se tiene de toda la creación. Los dibujos coloridos de árboles, hojas,

animales, aves, personas, flores, etc., representan la unidad de todo lo creado. La cinta que se utiliza para enrollar el pelo simboliza precisamente la serpiente coral como emisaria entre las personas y lo creado en las montañas. La práctica Maya es pues todo un ritual cotidiano entre todo lo que existe.

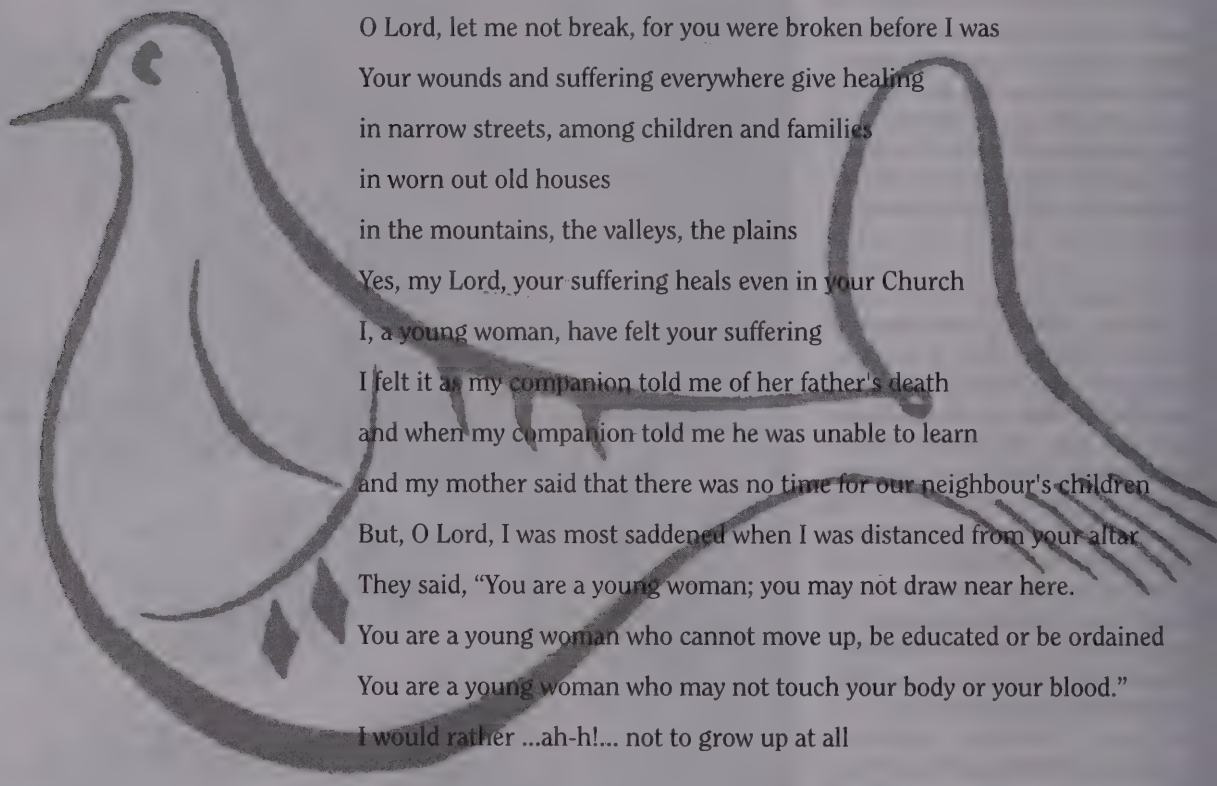
Además la cruz Maya no es igual a la cruz Cristiana, ya que de la cruz Maya cuelgan hojitas de árboles, aves, animales y flores. Las cuatro puntas de la cruz simbolizan también los puntos cardinales del universo que deben presentarse en forma comunitaria al creador, respetándose armoniosamente.

A Prayer

by Najla Qassab

(translated from Arabic)

المسيح – السلام



O Lord, let me not break, for you were broken before I was
Your wounds and suffering everywhere give healing
in narrow streets, among children and families
in worn out old houses
in the mountains, the valleys, the plains
Yes, my Lord, your suffering heals even in your Church
I, a young woman, have felt your suffering
I felt it as my companion told me of her father's death
and when my companion told me he was unable to learn
and my mother said that there was no time for our neighbour's children
But, O Lord, I was most saddened when I was distanced from your altar
They said, "You are a young woman; you may not draw near here.
You are a young woman who cannot move up, be educated or be ordained
You are a young woman who may not touch your body or your blood."
I would rather ...ah-h!... not to grow up at all

Is this acceptable to you, O my Lord?
True, you have accepted that I be broken with you, but I demand of you a resur
a resurrection from every notion that distances me from you
a resurrection from institutions wherein there is no love nor hope
a resurrection from sights that distress and disarrange my femininity
You intentionally created me, O Lord.
I am, in my person, a young woman.

Tha name "Christ" (*al-masih*), in the figure of a dove
Caligraphic design by Joseph Paltas

An American Indian Theological Response to Affirmation VII:

"Creation as Beloved by God"

by George E. Tinker

George E. Tinker - Photo by Peter Williams - W

Eco-Justice, Sovereignty and a Theology of Liberation

Given the fundamental differences between American Indian cultural values and those of Euro-American peoples, it should be no mystery that the relationship between the two has been consistently one of conquest, colonization and finally the eco-devastation of our territories. Our theological reflection must move towards a sharper assessment of the systemic causes of this ethno- eco-devastation from an Indian perspective and towards the development of possible solutions. We must understand the connection between ecological and social injustice in the world if there is to be significant transformation from the current global crisis to a healthy and sustainable future. Hence, it becomes empty quixotism to think of treating ecological devastation apart from treating issues of racism and on-going colonialism, including especially those of new forms of colonialism which some have called neo-colonialism.

In particular, I am arguing that the two-fold problem of eco- and social justice is systemic in character, and that the concerns of ethno-eco-justice must move beyond the mere naming of ecological devastations that are affecting Indian peoples and other Indigenous and poor peoples today. Changing only individual patterns of behaviour has failed us as a strategy. We will need more holistic and systemic solutions, and systemic solutions call for theological and philosophical foundations.

It needs to be said here that by a theological response to the systemic I do not have in mind just another individualistic intellectual exercise of the sort that have plagued our universities and seminaries too much, but rather a theological reflection that is far more communal. Theology must become an exercise

in expressing the self-identity of whole communities. For this sort of theology, we need stories rather than treatises, rather than essentialist discourse, problem-resolution or structuralist puzzle solving. Not even some post-structuralist deconstruction that never seems to emerge from the text will finally be able to touch the hearts and minds of whole communities. For theology of this magnitude, we must have stories.

The Euro-Americans have stories, of course, but they tend to be stories of conquest. For instance, Columbus is the quintessential all-American culture hero, the perfect exemplar for the righteous empire, the "discoverer" and conqueror who knew no sin. Even Jesus, the most important culture hero of America, has become a conqueror in Western story telling. The sacrificial cross of Jesus has become a symbol of conquest that seems to encourage more conquest *in the history of the mission enterprise*. Thus the myth of Columbus and the stories of conquest continue to play themselves out with disastrous consequences in the lives of modern Indian peoples.

What Euro-Americans do not yet have is a story that accounts for their history of systemic violence in the world and their easy proclivity for rationalizing any act of military or economic colonization and conquest as somehow good. Instead, Euro-Americans and their elected officials seem to engage in a behaviour pattern well-known in alcohol and drug addictions therapy, called denial. Too many churches and too many politicians have lived out such a denial, like ostriches with their heads in the sand as if such eco-devastation and national injustice and immorality cannot possibly affect them, living in the protected comfort zones of American society. Easy answers are too often given that reflect some level of denial: It is too late to rectify injustices perpetrated against Indian nations; too much water has gone under that bridge. Or it is sometimes insisted that Indians are too small a percentage of the population to merit attention. We are forced, they claim, to concentrate on the vast majority of Americans, to maximize the good (and wealth) for the most people. This old Euro-American philosophical tradition of utilitarianism continues to exert its powerful influence on political practice to such an extent that abject racism can thrive, rationalized as being "in the best interests of the state". It becomes all too easy to think of Indian reservations as "national sacrifice areas". Stories of conquest are complemented by stories of utilitarian rationalization.

Even in those cases in which we have begun to address ourselves to community well-being and eco-justice, we seem to do so with isolated strategies and a much too narrow focus. Especially at the level of theological reflection, the churches have not yet begun to deal with eco-justice, let alone, ethno-eco-justice and racism, as a systemic whole, as a system of oppression rooted in structures of power that touch every part of our lives. At the level of liberal political action and theoretical reflection in the United States, solutions have still dealt typically with "them" and "their" problems rather that with the "us" of the United States and "our" participation in the on-going story of world injustices. As long as the liberal Euro-American story only includes Euro-Americans in the role of moral conquerors providing solutions to others' problems, the real root causes of the problem will never go away. That is to say, even our proposed solutions have not been comprehensive enough to genuinely address the problem.

Focusing on the rise of western individualism and the systemic destruction of Indigenous communities worldwide, I address what I see as a key systemic aspect of the problem. The culture of the West (European and Euro-American) is a culture of the individual, and, through modern colonialist institutions (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the imposition of this culture of individualism is quickly being extended throughout the colonized (Two- Thirds) world via economic and political development policies. In the ongoing discourse about human rights, for instance, most would argue for understanding such rights in terms of individual rights while vehemently denying extension of the category to groups. Human rights are, by definition, the inherent rights of individuals and not rights of culturally discrete, Indigenous national communities. Hence, the cultures of these communities can be destroyed with impunity.

Further, I want to insist that the dismantling of Indigenous communities has happened at a philosophical as well as political level. To put it another way, I am arguing that modern ecological devastation is in no small part generated by the Western, European shift that devalued communal interests in favour of the increasing prominence of the individual and that this shift can be measured in the lack of political and economic respect and the lack of legitimacy of self-governing, au-

What we want is life in the sense of self-sufficient, cultural, spiritual, political and economic sustainability - on our own terms.

tonomous, long-lived Indigenous communities. The prior question is one of Indian sovereignty, for the sake of reclaiming Indian community sustainability, first of all; but, so I shall argue, for the sake perhaps even for the health and sustainability of the world community as well.

Indians want life. We do not just want mere existence, that is, life in the sense of simple biological survivability. What we want is life in the sense of self-sufficient, cultural, spiritual, political and economic sustainability - on our own terms. At this late date, the question is not whether Indian peoples should have the right to self-determining autonomy, but how our communities can regain this rightful heritage without the continuing colonial pressure to feed the consumptive habits of White America. We believe that the larger justice issue involved is one of both political hegemony and ecological survivability. The answer to this systemic problem may contain part of the answer to sustainability for all people on this earth.

American Indian cultures and values have much to contribute in the comprehensive re-imagining of the Western value system that has resulted in our contemporary eco-justice crises. The main point that must be made is that there were and are cultures that take their natural environment seriously and attempt to live in balance with the created whole around them in ways that help them not overstep environmental limits. Unlike the West's consistent experience of alienation from the natural world, these cultures of Indigenous Peoples consistently experienced themselves as part of that created whole, in relationship with everything else in the world. They saw and continue to see themselves as having responsibilities, just as every other creature has a particular role to play in maintaining the balance of creation as an on-going process. This is ultimately the spiritual rationale for annual ceremonies like the sun dance or green corn dance. As another example, Lakota peoples planted cottonwoods and willows at their campsites as they broke camp to move on, thus beginning the process of reclaiming the land which humans had necessarily trampled through habitation and encampment.

American Indian cultures and values have much to contribute in the comprehensive re-imagining of the Western value system that has resulted in our contemporary eco-justice crises.

We now know today that Indigenous rainforest peoples, in what is today called the state of Brazil, had a unique relationship to the forest in which they lived, moving away from a cleared area after farming it to a point of reduced return and allowing the clearing to be reclaimed as jungle. The group would then clear a new area and begin a new cycle of production. The whole process was relatively sophisticated and functioned in harmony with the jungle itself. So extensive was their movement that some scholars are now suggesting that there is actually very little of what might rightly be called "virgin forest" in what had been considered the "untamed" wilds of the rainforest.

What I have described here is more than just a coincidence or, worse, some romanticized falsification of Native memory. Rather, I am insisting that there are peoples in the world who live with an acute and cultivated sense of their intimate participation in the natural world as part of an intricate whole. For Indigenous peoples, this means that when they are presented with the concept of development, it is senseless. Most significantly, one must realize that this awareness is the result of self-conscious effort on the part of traditional American Indian national communities and is rooted in the first instance in the mythology and theology of the people. At its simplest, the worldview of American Indians be expressed as Ward Churchill describes it:

there are peoples in the world who live with an acute and cultivated sense of their intimate participation in the natural world as part of an intricate whole.

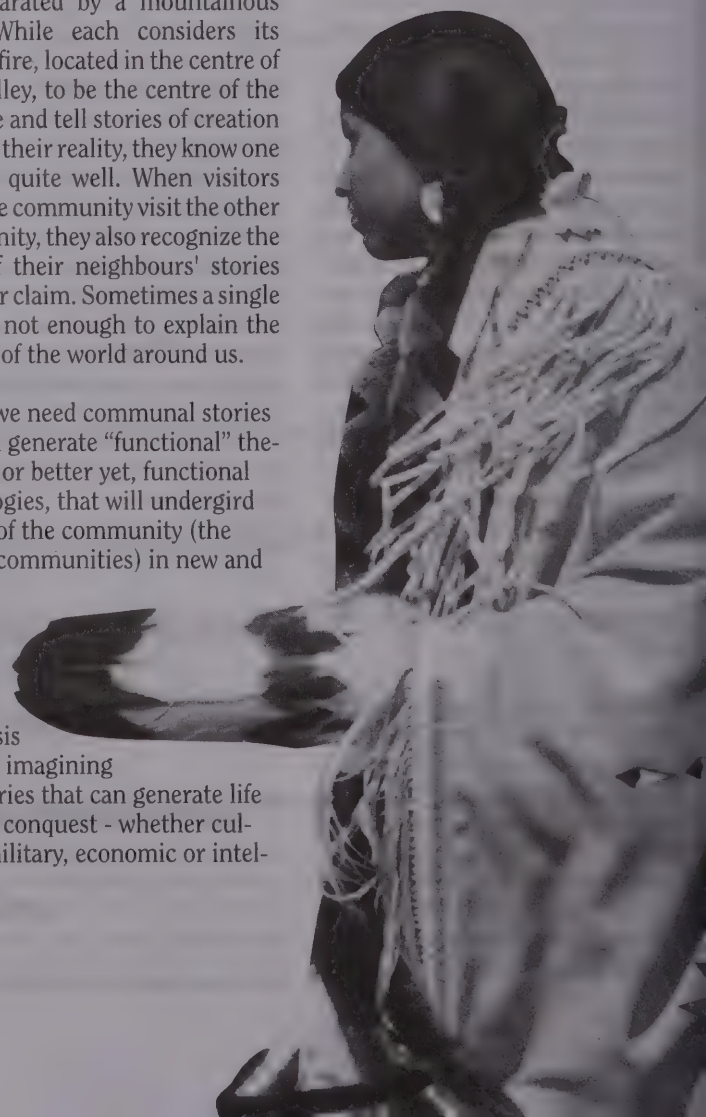
Human beings are free (indeed, encouraged) to develop their innate capabilities, but only in ways that do not infringe upon other elements - called "relations", in the fullest dialectical sense of the word - of nature. Any activity going beyond this is considered as "imbalance", a transgression, and is strictly prohibited. For example, engineering was and is permissible, but only insofar as it does not permanently alter the earth itself. Similarly, agriculture was widespread, but only within norms that did not supplant natural vegetation. ***(Churchill, Struggle for the Land, p. 17)***

Like the varieties of species in the world, each culture has a contribution to make for the sustainability of the whole. Given the reality of eco-devastation threatening all of life today, the survival of American Indian cultures and cultural values may make the difference for the survival and sustainability for all the earth as we know it. What I have suggested in this essay implicitly is that American Indian peoples may have something of value, something corrective to Western values and the modern world system, to offer to the world. The loss of these gifts, the loss of the particularity of these peoples, today threatens the survivability of us all. What I am most passionately arguing is that we must commit to the struggle for the just and moral survival of Indian peoples as the peoples of the Earth, and that this struggle is for the sake of the Earth and for the sustaining of all of life. It is now imperative that we change the modern value of acquisitiveness and the political system and economics that consumption has generated. The key to making this massive value shift in the world system may lie in the international recognition of Indigenous political sovereignty and self-determination. Returning native lands to the sovereign control native peoples around the world, beginning in the United States, is not simply just. The survival of all may depend on it.

We have suggested that an appropriate theological response must emerge from communities rather than from the minds of individual intellectuals and that these theological responses to the modern crisises of ecological and social devastation must thus begin as a story of existence that can move us beyond the West's usual stories of conquest. Yet having said this much, a word of caution must be added. Any emergent story or theological response must be careful not to fall into the trap of becoming just another layer of the conquest motif. Even the so-called "common" creation story, currently in vogue among many in the ecological movement runs the risk of being conquest-oriented. It is common only insofar as it has been able to impose itself on others, of conquering the stories of others.

Imagine two Indian communities separated by a mountainous ridge. While each considers its council fire, located in the centre of their valley, to be the centre of the universe and tell stories of creation to verify their reality, they know one another quite well. When visitors from one community visit the other community, they also recognize the truth of their neighbours' stories and their claim. Sometimes a single truth is not enough to explain the balance of the world around us.

Yet we need communal stories that can generate "functional" theologies, or better yet, functional mythologies, that will undergird the life of the community (the lives of communities) in new and vibrant ways. The contemporary crisis calls for imagining new stories that can generate life and not conquest - whether cultural, military, economic or intellectual!



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Theology of Life: A case study in Malawi

All exercise of power is accountable to God

The life of the church and Malawi's democratization

by Kenneth R. Ross

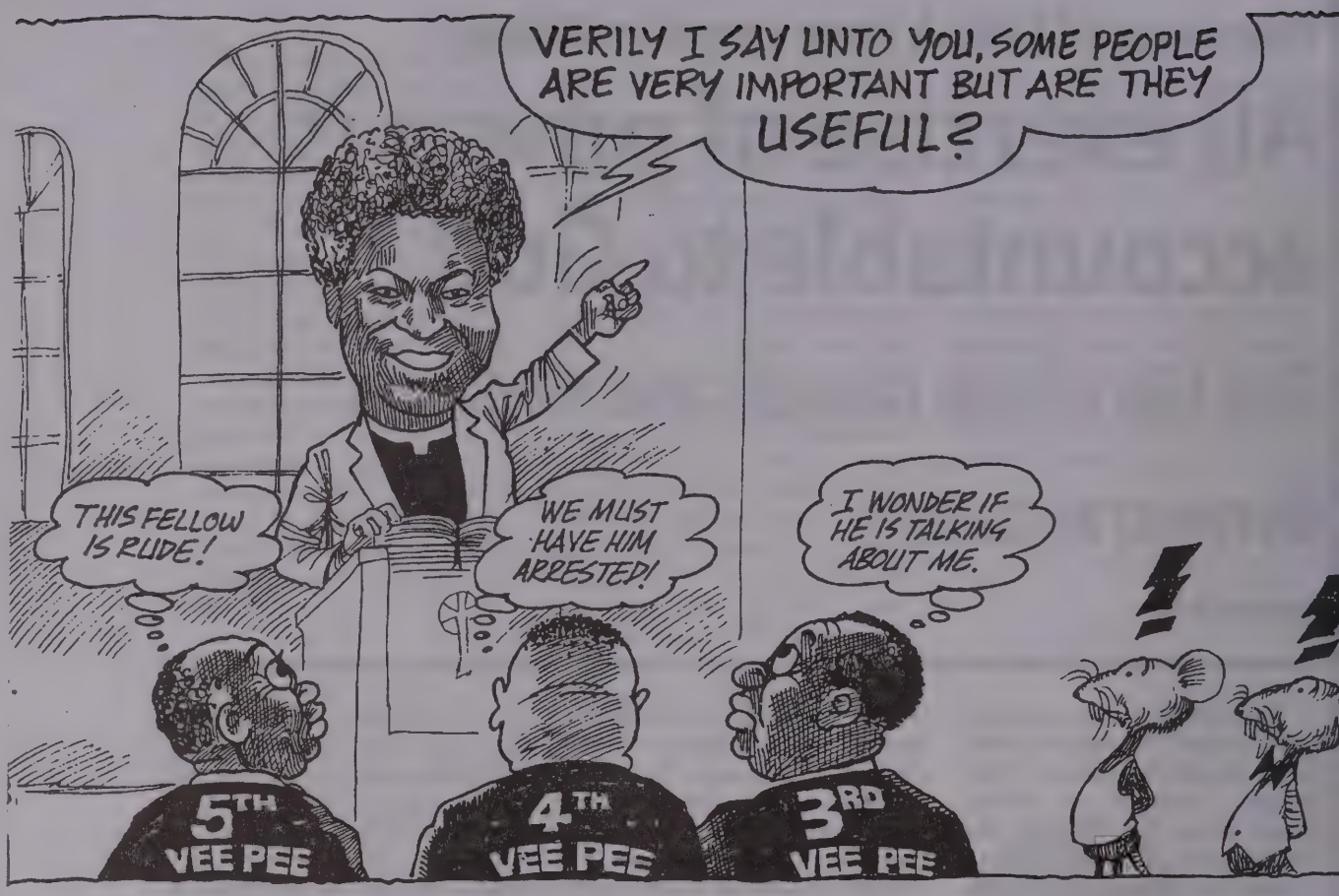
The churches, to the surprise of many, have been remarkably effective in the role of midwives of democratic transition in Malawi. History shows, however, that the church's political witness tends to be most effective when it comes to confrontation with manifest injustice. It is less effective when it comes to the task of patient reconstruction after some watershed political change. An immediate challenge in Malawi was whether the churches would be able to open up a critical distance from the new government which was composed of people with whom they had worked shoulder-to-shoulder in the struggle for democracy. There have been conscious attempts to adopt a prophetic stance towards the new government, as at the National Service of Worship on 6 July 1995 when Silas Ncozana "made a scathing attack on those in positions of power who only wanted to feel important without contributing to the country's development."[1]

A critical question, however, is whether the churches' public witness would be confined to occasional statements of denominational leaders or would there be a mechanism for addressing national issues from a united and consolidated basis? The importance of this question for the integrity of the church itself has been highlighted in recent ecumenical thinking. The World Council of Churches' Tantur Consultation of November 1994 asked: "Is it enough to say that, if a church is not engaging responsibly with the ethical issues of the day, it is not being fully church? Must we not also say: if the churches are not engaging those ethical issues *together then none of them individually is being fully church?*"[2]

In the Malawi context such a question puts the focus on the Public Affairs Committee (the PAC) which was the vehicle of the churches' united action in the democratic transition. Was it simply an *ad hoc* Committee addressing a particular set of needs at a particular time? Or does it have a permanent place at the interface between religion and politics in Malawi?

It is too early to answer this question with any certainty. However, it is notable that in mid-1995, when a number of the new human rights' organizations had already lost their credibility, the voice of the PAC still carried considerable weight. In May 1995, e.g., the PAC was able to bring together leading politicians from all the main parties for a "Round-table" aimed at promoting tolerance and reconciliation. The new PAC Chairman, Bishop Tarsisius Ziyaye, warned the political leaders: "Nobody will come from outside to find solutions to our problems... Collectively we should endeavour to find solutions instead of pointing fingers at each other." [3]

In August 1995 the PAC sent an open letter to the President criticising the government for being accountable to international institutions rather than its own people and, in particular, for resisting World Bank recommendations to trim the cabinet while agreeing to remove the subsidies on fertilizers.[4] It is worth noticing the attention which this letter was given in an editorial of The Nation, the country's most respected daily newspaper: "We find this statement significant not only because of its contents but more because of its source. This is the same body under which the two coalition partners (the United Democratic Front, UDF, and the Alliance for Democracy, AFORD) fought with the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) to get rid of the one-party dictatorship. This is a body composed of clergy who played a very effective role to transform the country's political system, and whose influence surpasses any other in this country. The statement is reminiscent of the his-


VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, SOME PEOPLE ARE VERY IMPORTANT BUT ARE THEY USEFUL?
THIS FELLOW IS RUDE!
WE MUST HAVE HIM ARRESTED!
I WONDER IF HE IS TALKING ABOUT ME.
5TH VEE PEE
4TH VEE PEE
3RD VEE PEE

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toric Pastoral Letter through which the Catholic bishops unleashed their might behind the suffering of the people of Malawi and helped transform society. We are very hopeful that, coming from the clergy as it does, the concern will be taken seriously by government and that appropriate action will be taken."[5]

Such a response to a PAC open letter in the second year of the new political dispensation suggests that the churches may well continue to play an important role in national affairs. At the same time developments in early 1996, notably the appointment of PAC Vice-Chairman, and frequent spokesperson Joseph Bvumbwe, to the chairmanship of the powerful Press Corporation, led critics to suggest that the PAC was now in the pocket of the government and silenced as a critical voice.[6] Powerful are the forces operating to secure the PAC's collusion with government and it will not retain its independence without a struggle, especially since government patronage will always hold a strong appeal for impoverished church leaders. Yet the experience of having been compromised and silenced has sharpened the sensitivity of church leaders to the importance of maintaining critical distance in relation to government. The churches are preparing themselves to play the role of watchdog in relation to national political life, exposing any corruption which creeps into the exercise of government and detecting any imbalances in the separation of powers.

To be the watchdog, however, is an essentially negative role concerned with guarding the structures, institutions and mechanisms of democracy so as to ensure that they continue working smoothly. The deeper challenge for the churches is not to stop there but to undertake the positive task of nurturing the spiritual roots of democracy.

For democracy to be effective it is not enough to establish a certain legal and constitutional system. There is need for the inner drive and motivation to make the system work. It is when democracy is considered at this deeper level that religious considerations arise, especially in a context where the worldview and behaviour of the people is greatly influenced by religion. To be democratic is to have an orientation and an openness to others, a willingness to accept those who are different and to work together for a more just and peaceful society. "This", as John de Gruchy notes, "is not something which democracy itself can produce; it is a spiritual value of redemptive love which no political system can manufacture."[7]

The challenge to the church is one which cuts much deeper than the issue of whether it can raise a prophetic voice in relation to the politics of the day. For it reaches to the heart of the church's own life and calls it to be the community whose being is comprised of such

outgoing and redemptive love. As we have noted time and again, the deep issues of democratization which Malawi faces are concentrated in the struggle within the life of the church itself to be true to its calling. The church must take the lead in an exercise of national repentance. The church must be the first to acknowledge its guilty silence to the Jehovah's Witnesses {who have been persecuted by the government over a long period of time in Malawi}. The church in its own structures must break the spell of regionalism so that, e.g., churches will rejoice to elect a good leader who happens to originate from another region. The church must fulfil its calling to be a church of the poor and the instrument of their economic empowerment. The church must take the lead in protecting the dignity of women and demonstrating its confidence in them by electing them to positions of leadership. The church must be the place where young people feel at home, find respect and a setting where they can exercise their gifts. The church must enable the state to be the state by demolishing its quasi-religious pretensions and awakening the humility and humanity which it needs to fulfil its task. The church must take the lead in generating the organization of people's initiatives which produce a vibrant civil society. The church must be alert to eliminate any traces of corruption and nepotism in its own life - otherwise it will never be able to remove the speck in its brother's eye! It is precisely as the church fights and wins these battles within its own life that it will prove to be an agent of democratization in Malawi.

Nurturing the spiritual roots of democracy is a matter which must engage the church not primarily in its upper echelons but rather at the grassroots level. In the watchdog function of the church the top leadership is necessarily prominent. Committees, Councils, Conferences, Synods and Assemblies have access to the public arena and top church leaders can address national issues through the mass media. This gives the opportunity to engage with national politics when required. It was through statements issued at this level that the churches were effective as the midwives of democracy.

When it comes, however, to the consolidation and deepening of democracy, attention turns to the church at the level of the local congregation or base community. Surveying the African scene as a whole Terence Ranger has observed that: "The opening of the second revolution takes place at the centre and the combined church hierarchy can play a critical role. But sustainability will be won or lost in the regions, the localities and at the grass roots. The mark of the first phase is the making of constitutions; the mark of the second must be the achievement of local autonomy."[8] This indicates the limits of the kind of activity which in Malawi has been channelled through the PAC. When doing research on Christology among rural people in Northern Malawi I found that quite often respondents would cite the PAC as evidence for the connection between faith in Christ and political action.[9] However, it is seen largely as an elite organization for top church leaders. The question is whether the churches can make the transition needed to be effective in Ranger's "second phase", i.e. to be an organization operating at local level to promote democratic participation and empowerment.

Here the question is whether the church has the kind of *congregations* which can be forces for democratization. The most exalted vision and the sharpest prophetic witness offered by individual church leaders can very easily be completely undermined by what Peter Walshe has described in another context as "timid local clergy and phlegmatic parishes".[10] The issue of whether Malawi should have a democratic political *system* has been to a large extent settled. What remains to be seen is whether Malawi will have the democratic *people* to make democracy happen! Without people committed to democratic participation the system will quickly become discredited and could easily fall apart. The church, when it is true to its calling, is engaged in the formation of people. It is intended to generate people who have a sense of vocation, who are oriented to "the other", who have a vision of a just society inspired by the reality of the kingdom of God. If the life of the church does impart such spiritual values to its members, then it can play a key role in producing the vital ingredient which has been too much missing from Malawi's democracy: informed, committed, dynamic popular participation.

For the church to fulfil such a role will inevitably be disturbing for it will give such a voice to the voiceless and such power to the powerless as will certainly shake the established order. But is this not what democracy is all about? This first institution to be shaken will be the church itself - for a movement of grassroots empowerment will raise questions about ecclesiastical polity. This is something that has already begun to be evident. In the Roman Catholic Church younger priests were ready to point out that the very Bishops who had championed democracy in the political arena operated in their dioceses on a basis of dictatorship![11] It is said that in the new Malawi you can freely criticize the State President but you dare not criticize the Bishop or General Secretary of your church! It was partly the same concern which moved women of Blantyre Synod to march to the Administrators' Conference with their petition on "Justice and Peace *in the Church*".[12] Part of the problem is that the exercise of ecclesiastical power is still conditioned by the authoritarianism of the one-party system? Silas Ncozana has acknowledged how powerful this factor was in the past: "The one-party system certainly influenced the way the church exercised its power because when one looks at the Presbyterian system there are so many groups which were being marginalised in decision-making within the church. For instance the voice of lay people has been minimal, even at this time when we have

been trying to raise the voices of lay people... So the church became much more clerical than it ought to have been."[13]

The extent to which this model of church life still prevails was illustrated when the Blantyre Synod Office issued its statement on the "Born Again" issue and defined a Presbyterian Church in these terms:

> This type has a moderator and Senior Clerk as leaders of the General Synod. Moderator and General Secretary in a Synod. Moderator and Presbytery Clerk, Moderator (minister) and clerk of the Kirk Session. Power in this type of church is exercised by ministers and members at a General Synod, Synod, Presbytery and Kirk Session. People who are not pleased with the hierarchy and exercise of power secede to other churches.[14]

Clearly the church has not been immune from the tendency to think of the exercise of power in authoritarian terms and this limits its capacity to be a force for democratization. Similarly, church leadership too often mirrors the corruption and graft prevalent in the wider society rather than offering a challenge to it. Clergy seek power within the church structures in order to gain access to resources (principally money and women!) which they can use to their own personal advantage.[15] The churches have not been able to shake off this colonial legacy which still haunts practically every social and political institution in the country. Through their "theology acted" the churches tend to legitimate a wrong exercise of power rather than offering a fundamental challenge to it. So long as the church understands itself in terms of a power structure there will be limits to its effectiveness as an agent of the transformation of power. There is need for a deep repentance within the life of the church so that it can shake off the tendency to be the church "from above" and be the church "from below". This question of polity reaches deep into the identity of the church and, depending on the kind of answer it gives, determines the extent to which it can be a significant force in Malawi's democratization.

The true Lord is the serving man from Nazareth. The way he chose, and the way he directs us to take, involves not the love of power but the power of love.

Church, state and society in Malawi need a deep awareness that all exercise of power is accountable to God. From the Christian perspective this means that all authority must be conditioned by the kind of power which God has revealed in Jesus Christ. It means recognizing, with Kwame Bediako, that: "Jesus' way was one of engagement and involvement through a new way of overcoming arising from a unique concept of power - the power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination. Jesus won his way to pre-eminence and glory, not by exalting himself, but by humbling himself, to the point of dying a shameful death. In other words, his conception of power was that of non-dominating power."[16]

What was strikingly original in the life of Jesus, as Edward Schillebeeckx has observed, is that "power goes hand in hand in him with *goodness*."[17] The calling of the church is to discover in its own life an authentic praxis of that wholly different kind of power which was exercised in the life of Jesus. Can it find in its own life a turning to the infinitely demanding but infinitely hopeful kind of power that is found in the kingdom of God? To make the ancient Christian confession that Jesus Christ is Lord is to know, as Czech theologian Jan Milic Lochman has written, that: "no earthly (or heavenly) ruler, however bristling with power, is the real lord.The true Lord is the serving man from Nazareth. The way he chose, and the way he directs us to take, involves not the love of power but the power of love. Christians and the church itself can convincingly

Clearly the church has not been immune from the tendency to think of the exercise of power in authoritarian terms and this limits its capacity to be a force for democratization.

bear witness to and act in the name of Christ's Lordship only by ethically and politically conforming to *this* way, the way of solidarity, for others, the way that leads downward, not by an upward drive for sovereignty and power."[18]

It is only as the church makes this confession of the Lordship of Jesus Christ that it will bring to the exercise of power in Malawi that distinctive quality which it desperately needs. Even the very word used for politics - *ndale* - is a term which suggests intrigue, craftiness and chicanery. It stands, as Augustine Musopole has suggested, for "an anti-human understanding of politics".[19] It is an understanding of politics and power urgently in need of evangelization. It needs to discover, in the words of the Taiwanese theologian C.S. Song, that: "God's politics does not consist of attempts to seize power. What it aims at is the transformation of power. God's politics has to do with transformation of human politics. It does not seek to rule and dominate but rather to effect a repentance of power."[20] It is only when a transformation of the exercise of power in the direction of the Jesus-style power of the kingdom of God has been effected in church and society that the yearning for democracy in Malawi will begin to be satisfied.

Kenneth R. Ross works for the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Malawi. A book based on the case study report will be published in late 1996: K.R. Ross, ed., "God, People and Power in Malawi: Democratization in Theological Perspective" (Blantyre: CLAIM, 1996) available from the Kachere Series, PO Box 1037, Zomba, Malawi.

Notes:

1. *The Nation*, 7 July 1995.
2. "Report of the Consultation", in T.F. Best & M. Robra ed., *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Costly Commitment*, Geneva, WCC, 1995, p. 64.
3. *The Nation*, 19 May 1995.
4. *The Nation*, 24 August 1995.
5. *The Nation*, 25 August 1995.
6. See *Malawi News*, 20-26 April 1996, *The Nation*, 24 April 1996.
7. De Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy*, p. 244.
8. T. Ranger, "Conference Summary and Conclusion", in P. Gifford ed., *The Christian Churches and the Democratization of Africa*, p. 26.
9. See K.R. Ross, "Grassroots Christology in Northern Malawi: A Research Report", University of Malawi (unpublished), January 1996.
10. P.Walshe, *Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1995, p.143.
11. Unattributable interviews.
12. See *The Independent*, 19-24 January 1995, my italics.
13. Int. Silas Ncozana, 28 June 1995.
14. Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Blantyre Synod, Statement of Synod Office on "To be Born Again/Fellowship", 11 January 1995, translated from Chichewa by Rev. O. Maliya; my italics.
15. I am indebted at this point to the research currently being undertaken by Peter van Doepp, a doctoral student from the University of Florida investigating church and politics in Malawi.
16. Bediako, "De-sacralization and Democratization", p. 9.
17. E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, London: Collins, 1979, my italics. I am indebted to Rev. Jim Wilkie for drawing my attention to this passage.
18. J.M. Lochman, *The Faith We Confess: An Ecumenical Dogmatics*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985, pp. 96-97.
19. A.C. Musopole, "A Vision for Theology in Malawi", *Religion in Malawi*, No. 6 (1996).
20. C.S. Song, Third-Eye Theology, 2nd Ed., Maryknoll NY, Orbis, 1990, p. 241.

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Theology of Life: A case study in India

God's option for the poor

Consultation on Theological Issues for the Indian Church Today and Tomorrow*

held at Vishranti Nikayam, Bangalore during 22-24 August 1996

Issues which were used for reflection during the consultation were:

Fragmentation: With the vicissitudes of today's world, everything that held us together suddenly seems to have become weak, unable to make us feel that we belong to one another. Traditions, religions, cultures, languages, castes, classes, occupations, ethnic identities, etc., with the new demands on life, have become divisive factors as never before. With the fear of the other and the assertion of smaller identities, fragmentation has become a common feature, not only in India, but also in the world. Struggles for freedom, justice, dignity and self-identity on the one hand and ethnic, religious and linguistic conflicts on the other, have become familiar to us. While we do not look at pluralism as a negative phenomenon, we must nevertheless reflect upon this issue of fragmentation because of its implications to the poor and the future of our world. Ironically the Indian church itself is a fragmented church. What is the meaning of the ministry of reconciliation and the mission of God in this context of increasing fragmentation?

Polarisation: In the name of globalisation, the market forces are propagating a new vision of the world which denies possibilities and opportunities of growth to those who do not have resources. Besides this there are many other systems and structures which are at work further widening the gap between the rich and the poor, dominant and dependent, urban and rural, male and female, strong and weak. Consequently this phenomenon is creating a world where the powerless and weak have no value. The under-privileged communities and people such as women, Dalits, tribals, the rural and urban poor are going to be further marginalised. Therefore, the question is whether the church can stand with them or continue to remain neutral in this polarised world.

Power: The abuse of power in the hands of opportunistic leaders has become so common today shaping and reinforcing structures and relationships that are often unjust and oppressive. Unfortunately, the story of power in the church does not seem to be a better one. The combination of ritual and institutional power in the hands of a centralised leadership set-up such as in the church has become a matter of contradiction to the essence of the gospel and to the church's avowed concern for the poor. How do we understand power and exercise the same in the context of millions of powerless people?

Youth in transition: The impact of globalisation and the consequent changes in values and priorities, the growing individualism, etc., have serious implications as we think of the future. At this juncture, we need to focus on the less privileged young people, both from rural and urban areas, who are caught between the demands of a competitive, consumerist world on the one hand and the hard realities of their poverty and social disprivileges making them vulnerable to many evils on the other hand. What has been the attitude and the response of the church towards these young people, and what are the new directions as we think of the future?

The state of the Indian church: The Indian church is as diverse and puzzling as India itself. With a wide variety of theologies, ecclesiologies, confessional and liturgical traditions, besides the linguistic, ethnic and cultural distinctions, it seems hard to find a consensus on our common service and witness to our nation. The enormous volume of ethical reflection on a variety of issues that has been done, or is being done, is of no use until and unless the churches are enabled to reflect seriously on what it means to be a church. Often preoccupied with their own institutional matters and maintaining an urban, elitist image, our churches are yet to internalise the values of justice and equality within. What alternative models of church life can we think of in order to remain credible and faithful?

Leadership: Most of our leaders have become a source of embar-

rassment and so are their styles of functioning. Uninhibited corruption, nepotism, highly materialistic life-styles, political opportunism and victimisation, authoritative hierarchy, lack of accountability, innumerable court cases, lack of sound or, many times, any, theological direction, etc., - this endless list is what speaks about our leaders and these seem to have become the outstanding characteristics of many a 'successful' church leader today. What do we do with this aspect of church life?

MESSAGE TO OUR CHURCHES AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

We, the 68 participants of this consultation, representing the churches, theological colleges and various organisations in India, have spent three days reflecting together on the state of our churches and their responses to some of the crucial issues of our time with the overall purpose of envisaging a theology of life based on the affirmation God's option for the poor. The increasing fragmentation and polarisation of people and the society, the unabated marginalisation of the poor, the abuse of power and the repression of dissent, and the predicament of those young people who are caught between the demands of a consumerist world on one hand and the hard realities of their poverty on the other, were some of the issues that caught our special attention.

Threats to life

As we met to discuss the theological issues for the Indian church today and tomorrow, we have become conscious of the new threats to life at the threshold of a new millennium and the context of the ongoing struggles of:

- the rural and urban poor for food, shelter, clothing and employment;
- the Dalits for human dignity and justice;
- women for life and equality;
- the tribals who are struggling for self-identity and against the destruction of their very livelihood and habitats;
- the numerous threats to all forms of life and to the survival of the earth;
- those children who are struggling to survive by giving up their childhood;
- the aged, the differently-abled, and the destitutes who are made to look at themselves as a burden;
- the young for whom the future has become a nightmare, and
- those who have become victims of drug abuse and AIDS.

Denial of opportunities, struggle for day to day survival, violence of different sorts, social evils, threats and fears, are the features of their common experience. With no

A Maharashtra Dalit cultural group dramatizes the history of Dalit oppression. Photos by Bharat, Nikki Photo Services - New Dehli

opportunities for participation in any structure of the society or upward mobility, and now with the disastrous market economy, the poor are being marginalised further. Therefore, we hold that today's India denies life and dehumanises many who are weak and powerless.

Our churches

We have looked at the ways that we, as churches, have responded to the challenges posed by the situation. While we do acknowledge the overall concern and sensitivity of the churches to these, we also realise the urgent need to introspect and rediscover what it means to be a church in the present situation.

We discussed about the existing patterns of church life. We realise that while professing concern for the poor and the marginalised we have not allowed that concern to shape our life and relationships in community. We have helped them but did not join them in their struggles. We have understood sin and salvation in narrow individualistic ways and failed to condemn the systemic violations of life here on earth, and to profess salvation as holistic and corporate. We have preached about the hope of life that comes after death and rarely about the promise of fullness of life for all. We have often misinterpreted the scriptures to justify oppressive values and relationships based on caste, class and gender discrimination. We have perpetuated oppression of the poor either directly or through our silence. Our present forms of theological understanding, by and large, tend to be either otherworldly and mystic or rational and church-based, alienating people of other faiths, marginalising the simple and the lowly, rejecting our responsibility to the rest of the creation. What we have failed to recognise is the need to have a theology of life for all people rather than one that is meaningful only to those within the church.

A Maharashtra Dalit cultural group dramatizes the history of Dalit oppression. Photo by Bharat, Nikki Photo Services - New Delhi

An appeal for a Theology of Life

Therefore, we realise that affirming our faith in God in Christ in this dehumanised and dehumanising situation calls us for a renewed commitment to life in all its fullness for all and to the vision of a new world. It implies commitment to a pattern of life as given to us by Christ who proclaimed victory of life over death, oppression, bondage, discrimination and who gave us the model of shared life in the ideal of living the neighbour as one's self. We need to be guided by a theological vision that affirms the wholeness and unity of all life and all people. We also realise that such a theology of life cannot emerge from mere paternalistic compassion for the poor, but can only emerge from the experiences and perspectives of those for whom life is denied and from the consciousness of the present threats to and struggles for life, the increasing injustice as well as the signs of hope in the growing awareness of the poor. Therefore, being in solidarity with those for whom life is denied and apprehending the meaning and promise of life in these struggles of people are essential for this theological discovery.

Its implications

Poverty in India is not merely an economic phenomenon but is essentially rooted in the socio-cultural heritage of the society. This fact compels us to critically evaluate the effectiveness of our ministries. We believe that we need to fight poverty and its roots if we are serious about our concern for the poor. We need to condemn poverty as a systemic sin and openly commit ourselves to be in solidarity with those who are thus sinned against.

India's poor today are not just a hapless, passive lot. They are getting organised in a big way to resist, assert and claim their share of justice. They are becoming aware of the structural dimension of their poverty, of the possibilities of change, of their rights and the tremendous potential of their collective power. This eruption of the poor is threatening to shake the very foundations of the Indian society - caste and patriarchy - and offers new signs of hope. Therefore, now is the time for the church to decide whether it wants

A Maharashtra Dalit cultural group dramatizes the history of Dalit oppression. Photos by Bharat, Nikki Photo Services - New Dehli

to be on the side of the powerful for the sake of its own survival and safety or to be with the poor in their historic march towards a new India of justice and life for all. We need to see ourselves as partners with the poor in furthering the mission of God.

As we discern the processes of marginalisation and the blatant, as well as subtle, methods of marginalisation in the society based on language, race, ethnicity, caste, class, gender, age, religion, region, etc., we need to ensure the absence of all such forms within our churches.

We also need to take part and support the liberation struggles which are taking place in the church and society. The mission for the church is to be in the vanguard of life and to stand with all forces and elements which are committed to the values of God's reign of justice, love and abundant life for all. The resources of our churches must be used to support such liberation movements. This also implies that the present models of authoritative hierarchy and centralised power structures do not go well with the churches' concern for the victims of power structures.

We need to discover new forms of koinonia in a pluralistic context. The Theology of Life invites us to a koinonia of communities with various religious and ideological persuasions based on the affirmation that Christ died for all, reconciling to God the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer, all of humanity and the whole of creation.

It is in this context that a theology committed to life instills hope for the Indian church. This Theology of Life affirms God's option for the poor by challenging the values of the world with the values of God's reign as told to us by Christ. This means changing our life-styles and structures. This also implies rediscovering the church in terms of the local, and essentially of people, rather than hierarchy and structures. Therefore, a Theology of Life is a theology of sharing and just relationships. It calls for a reorientation of relationships based on a proper understanding of our faith. It compels a radical re-ordering of our life-styles, attitudes and structures of human relationships in community. To be just and humane is a conscious moral and spiritual choice that one has to make in the context of life in community.

Towards a new ecclesia

Based on these, we envision a new church (ecclesia) in the present Indian context that comprises all sections of the poor and the oppressed, along with those in solidarity with them and also the redeemed oppressors. This new ecclesia transcends all barriers of caste, class, gender and denominations, and strives to sum up all things in Christ.

A shared life in the sharing of resources in total obedience to the commandment of loving the neighbour as one's self will form the overarching principle of this new koinonia.

The new ecclesia affirms the centrality of God who liberates. The praxis of this faith is reflected in the praxis of the church which is undergirded by the affirmation in Christ's redemption through his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Its pastoral and diakonal functions are to be in the service of the poor enabling them to herald the reign of God in our midst.

The new ecclesia affirms a spirituality that confronts and overcomes all life-negating forces and strives to build the community rooted in the love of God, justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

** Organised by the India Case Study process of the Theology of Life programme (coordinated by the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Madras) in collaboration with the Mission and Evangelism Unit of the National Council of Churches in India and the Department of Programmes and Church Relations of the Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College.*

The WCC Central Committee Meets

New Warnings about WCC Future

extracted from the WCC Communication Department Media Release

GENEVA, 20 September 1996 - The need for fundamental changes in the shape of the World Council of Churches as the third millennium approaches dominated discussions at the 47th meeting of the international ecumenical body's Central Committee in September.

The discussion of the future of the Council focused on a 16 - page draft text setting out a "Common Understanding and Vision" of the WCC, which is to be submitted to the Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998.

From the outset it was evident that an issue not touched on in that text - the state of WCC finances - is not only setting clear limits to what kind of Council can be realistically foreseen for the 21st century but may also require significant administrative changes even before the WCC celebrates its 50th anniversary in Harare.

During its meeting the Central Committee also re-elected Konrad Raiser to a second five-year term as general secretary. In his opening report, which many Committee members hailed as realistic, courageous and hopeful, Raiser linked the WCC's financial plight to the discussion of its future. While insisting that "severe" staff and budget cuts already made, and still to come, do not threaten "the ability of the Council to respond to its basic mandate", he suggested that "the expectations, habits and institutional arrangements into which we have comfortably settled... are rapidly becoming barriers to the way forward".

The document on Common Understanding and Vision, taken up by the Committee, emphasizes an understanding of the WCC as primarily a "fellowship of churches" rather than an international organization operating apart from them. At the same time, it describes the WCC as one of many bodies (including regional, national and local councils and conferences of churches, confessional organizations and churches - like the Roman Catholic Church - which are not WCC members) that make up one ecumenical movement. The WCC, it says, could serve to foster coherence among the often overlapping and sometimes competing and conflicting activities of all these groups.

Dr Raiser distinguished such a "relational understanding" of the WCC from the prevailing image in many churches "of the Council as a service organization". Although "the profile of the WCC has been shaped mainly by its programmes" in the past 30 years, he argued that in the future the Council must "refrain from assuming direct programme responsibility in areas where others are better equipped to act" and discontinue programmes which have been taken up by national or regional ecumenical bodies. The WCC's role, according to him, should be as "enabler, coordinator, communicator, convener and sometimes mediator".

At the same time, he called for simplification of the WCC's complex governing structures, which he said tie up "too much energy and too many human and material resources... in processes of reporting and decision-making which have only limited effect on the life of the member churches".

Reactions to the Common Understanding and Vision document from Committee members were largely positive. Several members insisted that its focus on relationships among the churches should not obscure the passion for justice and peace, the identification with the poor and marginalized and the actions of pastoral solidarity with suffering people and churches which have characterized the WCC. Others, while agreeing with the need to streamline WCC structures, warned against "down- sizing" according to criteria of bureaucratic efficiency that would turn governing bodies into a rubber stamp by reducing the number of people involved or abandoning guidelines that ensure representation from all parts of the world and of women and youth.

The report from the Finance Committee underscored the warning issued by Central Committee moderator Catholicos Aram I, of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Lebanon, in his opening report that core areas of the WCC's are threatened "because member churches are just not funding the Council's work adequately".

The Finance committee told the

WCC Central Committee Meeting, Ecumenical Centre, Geneva, Sept 12-20, 1996
Press Conference September 19, 1996. From right to left: Ms Salpy ESKIDJIAN (Cyprus), Sam KOBIA (kenya), John NEWBURY (UK), WCC Press Officer, and Margot KAESSMANN (Germany).
Photo by Peter Williams - WCC

Central Committee that "our financial crisis is not yet over... We have contained the situation for 1997, but we must have more funds". In particular significant increases are needed in the amount of "undesignated income", given by churches to the WCC as "membership contributions" without restrictions on how it is to be spent.

Two issues stood out in the discussion of plans for the 1998 WCC Assembly in Harare: celebration of the eucharist and the implications for the Assembly of the attitudes towards and treatment of gay and lesbian persons in Zimbabwe, underscored by repeated and outspoken condemnations of homosexuality by President Robert Mugabe.

After continuing a discussion begun at its meeting last year, the Committee approved a proposal to ask local churches in Zimbabwe "to host the Assembly in eucharistic celebrations according to church traditions represented in Harare, one of these celebrations to be open to all who in good conscience would like to participate in the eucharist". Several members expressed pain and regret at this departure from the practice in earlier Assemblies of including an ecumenical eucharistic service open to all as part of the official programme. However, some members noted, holding an ecumenical eucharist within the Assembly itself is also painful, since certain participants - primarily Orthodox and Roman Catholics - are unable to take communion in good conscience at such a service.

The Committee endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the organization and conduct of the Assembly signed by representatives of the WCC, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the government of Zimbabwe. After a preamble which indicates that the WCC does not share the same opinion on the issues as the government and the ZCC, the document sets out some provisions needed to ensure the entry into Zimbabwe of all Assembly participants accredited by the WCC; gives the WCC the responsibility "to maintain order and discipline" at the Assembly site and ensures the WCC "the freedom to set the agenda and the programmes of the Assembly and to decide about the persons and the topics to be addressed". Also explicitly guaranteed are the WCC's right to exhibit print and audiovisual material related to the Assembly agenda, the Assembly's right "to express its views publicly on issues it deems fit", and the right of accredited journalists to "report and interpret the proceedings of the Assembly to the public at large".

While these provisions seemed to lay to rest suggestions coming from some quarters to relocate the Assembly, a number of Central Committee members expressed disquiet over the potential ramifications of the issue of homosexuality for the conduct of the Assembly as a whole. During plenary discussion in the Central Committee, the general secretary reported that the general secretariat committee had held "an open, sincere and very serious discussion" of the issue. Members of that committee had acknowledged that sexual orientation is "a potentially divisive concern that is already weighing on the internal unity of a fair number of WCC member churches and that if we push this debate too sharply it might force some churches to reconsider their relation to the WCC". At the same time, he added, "whether we like it or not, the issue is on our agenda; and the worst way to respond would be to try to keep it out".

While no formal action was taken, Dr Raiser said "there is an emerging understanding that we must find a way for the Central Committee at its next meeting to acknowledge and understand the issue we are discussing, what we share as a common base, what we expect to happen at the Assembly and what should not take place, so that we remain in control of the discussion."

Among actions pertaining directly to WCC programmes, the Central Committee declared 1997 as the Ecumenical Year for

Churches in Solidarity with the Uprooted, and called on all member churches and related organizations "to mobilize resources and organize activities" to support millions of people worldwide who have been forced from their homes by political upheavals and natural disasters.

It also approved continued support through the programme unit on sharing and service (Unit IV) of "advocacy work and networking for the rights of children with the direct involvement of children's organizations around the world". The urgency of such advocacy was vividly underscored by two teen- agers who addressed the Committee, Ashtha Tuladhar from Nepal and Craig Kielburger from Canada.

The Committee approved a series of recommendations intended to give focus to the WCC **Programme to Overcome Violence**, centred in Unit III, which it had mandated at its meeting in Johannesburg in 1994. Central among these was the launch of a global initiative entitled **"Peace to the City"**. The focus on the city, said Janice Love (United Methodist, USA), is warranted by the fact that "the city is where power is located, where people's homes are. And there is virtually no safe space for people anymore."

The World Council of Churches is drawing up a list of up to seven cities around the world which experience severe effects of violence but whose experience can also contribute to the search for peace. The seven cities should "visibly demonstrate both the destructive force of violence as well as significant initiatives of building peace and justice". The WCC hopes that through the initiative the cities will serve as models for creating a culture of peace world-wide.

"It should be cities known for conflict, cities that are symbols, synonyms for violence and symbols of hope, like Belfast and Manila, like Beirut and Chicago, Mostar and Port- au-Prince," Margot Kässmann, a member of the WCC's executive committee, told a press conference on 19 September. Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg had already been chosen, she said.

There will be a series of team visits to the cities during the next two years. Representatives from the selected cities will come together at the WCC's next Assembly - in 1998 in Zimbabwe - to help WCC member churches reflect on how the WCC might facilitate their work on overcoming violence in the period after the Assembly.

Dr Kässmann told journalists she was convinced that "the Programme to Overcome Violence has the potential to become the most significant moral and ethical enterprise of the World Council of Churches. As individuals and nations seek violent solutions to conflicts, the churches have to say a clear No," she declared.

Cities, she added, "can be symbols of the urgency to act. We do not want to describe violence, but to show that something can be done about it. We want to encourage churches to act, to cross barriers, to make new alliances and to rebuild broken communities."

The programme was also intended to examine situations where churches or religious groups contributed to the causes of violence, she said.

Responding to **developments in Burundi**, where ethnic conflicts since October 1993 have killed an estimated 100,000 people and displaced another 400,000, the Committee condemned "the continued use of violence by the armed groups and the military... to destroy innocent civilian life and property" and called on the military rulers "to take immediate steps to reestablish constitutional rule". The statement praised peacemaking efforts by regional and international bodies, especially the initiative by former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, and assured the churches of Burundi of "prayers and support in the trials of these days and in their efforts to become faithful witnesses for peace in their society".

The Committee also condemned the US Senate's Helms-Burton Amendment, which penalizes nations and companies doing business with Cuba, as a "new act of economic aggression against the people of Cuba". The statement said that the escalation in sanctions would have a "terrible impact" on the Cuban people; and it urged US President Bill Clinton "not to apply the measures called for" by the amendment. The Committee called on the US and Cuban governments "to resolve their differences through negotiation and dialogue".

In the wake of US air strikes in early September, the Committee approved a minute calling on all nations to "respect the territorial integrity of Iraq". The Committee commended an earlier WCC statement describing the attacks as "indefensible on moral grounds". It voiced appreciation for a statement by representatives of the US National Council of Churches which, while expressing "no sympathy for the policies of the present government of Iraq", called on the US and other governments "to pursue a course of discernment, diplomacy and cooperation that will both protect human life and embody the responsible use of power".

The Committee asked that a document on the **contemporary role of the church in international affairs** be sent to member churches for discussion, reflection and comment. During a press conference, WCC international affairs staff member Dwain Epps said he hopes this new document will help churches "to reassert their responsibility for looking at global issues". In the face of the growing complexity of the global situation in the post-Cold War period, he said, "our debates together must be more well-informed, so that the voice of the ecumenical movement can be heard and can make a difference, also by bringing the gospel to bear".

JOTtINGS

Unit Staff experiences shared

'Bob Scott reports that the Planning Committee from the Consultation 'Mining and Indigenous Peoples' (reported on in the last issue) met in Geneva in July. They finalised details for an Indigenous Global Information network - for exchange between Indigenous nations and communities involved in land struggles against the unlawful or unwanted intrusion of mining transnational corporations. Seven 'Language Contact Centres' have been set up for distribution of information in English, Russian and Spanish.'

THE WORLD'S YOUTH LONG FOR PEACE

Communique from World Council of Churches / All Africa Conference of Churches Inter- Regional Youth Training Seminar on Non-Violent Methods of Conflict Resolution:

Youth leaders from around the world met for ten days during July 1996 to discuss Peace Building and Non-Violent methods of conflict resolution. This was the second seminar in non- violent conflict resolution which brought participants from six continents and twenty-two countries to Johannesburg, South Africa.

During our deliberations on Peace Building, we were deeply saddened to hear of the recent escalation of the civil war in Liberia. The level of atrocity and brutality inflicted on the civilian population is outrageous and has never been seen prior to this day and age. An entire generation of youth and young leaders have been exposed to and recruited into too much inhumane violence, that one wonders what the future holds for Liberia. The question simply remains: Who will be the future leaders of Liberia?

As we pondered the challenge and delicate process that it takes to build peace, we heard news of the deterioration of the conflict situation in Burundi. This hit harder since among us there were two Burundian Youth leaders. One had already sought refuge in Nairobi and the other made it to the conference, but could not return home as the airport in Bujumbura was closed The entire Great Lakes region of Africa, as we are well aware, is afflicted by protracted conflicts that are deep rooted and complex. We are challenged as youth to understand the implications of such wars and to emphasize that our entire humanity has no peace as long as war rages, kills and maims innocent people in Liberia, Burundi and in other war-torn countries around the world.

Aware of the inherent and desperate need for peace, we, the young people from six continents share our concern and call for the support of all the people in all the nations in restoring peace to these countries. We send our solidarity especially to the people of Burundi and Liberia. And to the young people of these countries, our hearts reach out to you and we echo your dreams that God's peace and reconciliation may reach your land.

In Peace and Best Wishes

YOUTH INTERSHIP PROGRAMME for 1997-1998

1. WORSHIP AND THE EIGHTH ASSEMBLY

This Intern will join the work preparing the worship and related activities at the WCC's Eighth Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe (September 1998). Tasks will include encouraging the participation of young people in the Assembly worship, assisting in the preparation of worship and related material, and coordinating the programme of worship stewards at the Assembly.

Qualifications: a lively faith expressed in a love of worship and an openness to worship in a wide variety of styles. Experience in planning worship, self motivation, computer skills, and talents in one or more relevant fields (music, prayer writing, visual arts) are among the qualifications that will be considered. Capacity and willingness to handle administrative tasks (which at times will be the majority of the workload) will also be needed. Proficient English, with other languages an advantage.

2. YOUTH AND THE EIGHTH ASSEMBLY

This Intern will assist in the WCC's work preparing and assisting the Youth delegates to the Eighth Assembly. This will include assisting communications with young delegates, assisting in preparing and running the programme of the youth preparation meeting immediately before the Assembly, encouraging youth contributions and dialogue within the "meeting space" at the Eighth Assembly, and helping to prepare necessary materials for the preparation of Youth delegates.

Qualifications: experience with larger youth meetings; communication skills (spoken, but also written); sensitivity to ecumenical variety and inclusiveness; creative skills (art, drama, music, etc.) an advantage; fluency in two or more languages (including English) preferred; computer skills; patience.

3. INDIGENOUS YOUTH INTERN

This Internship will continue the work begun by the first intership (March 1995 to March 1996), but with increasing focus on the WCC's Eighth Assembly. The Intern will be expected to assist in the development of the Indigenous Peoples programmes which seek to increase participation of African Indigenous Peoples leading up to the Eighth Assembly and in the Assembly itself. The Intern will collaborate in the work of the WCC's Indigenous Peoples' programme; promote a network of Indigenous Youth Leaders; encourage Indigenous Youth contributions to the Eighth Assembly; and join in work with related organisations including the United Nations.

Qualifications: This Internship is open only to people of Indigenous background. A young person with a strong sense of Indigenous identity, and an integration of this and their faith life will be well prepared for this Internship. We shall also look for basic communication and computer skills, as well as research ability, and the capacity to work in a team. Self-motivation will also be required.

CLOSING DATE FOR ALL THREE INTERNSHIPS IS DECEMBER 31, 1996.

Please note that there is no application form for the Youth Internship Programme. Please write a letter to:

WCC Youth (Internships)
P.O. Box 2100
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

describing yourself, and why you want to undertake the Internship, and why you think you are qualified to do so. Include a CV. Thank you.

Peace to the City

Violence, in many shapes and guises - both individual and structural, against women, against minorities, against people of other ethnic origins and cultures, in the form of exploitation, deprivation, exclusion, armed conflict, environmental destruction, and more - is increasing in the world today.

Yet there are also people and groups, churches among them, who are working to bring peace with justice into homes, communities, churches, nations and the world. In response to the concern about the rising tide of violence, the World Council of Churches launched a Programme to Overcome Violence (POV) in 1994. It seeks to engage with churches, Christian groups and others in a "journey of transformation", inspiring them **to do more** to build a culture of peace with justice. It attempts to stimulate renewed vision, deeper analysis and more creative methods.

Peace to the City is a campaign within the Programme to Overcome Violence. It will focus on seven cities around the world where both destructive and constructive forces are at play - seven cities wracked by violence, where imaginative efforts to build bridges between communities split by violence are also going on.

The campaign will bring together existing experiences of overcoming violence. The idea is to give visibility to these efforts to reconstruct communities, to recognize the value of their approaches and methodologies, to stimulate sharing and networking. And perhaps most importantly, to give **others** a reason to hope... and to attempt something similar in their own contexts.

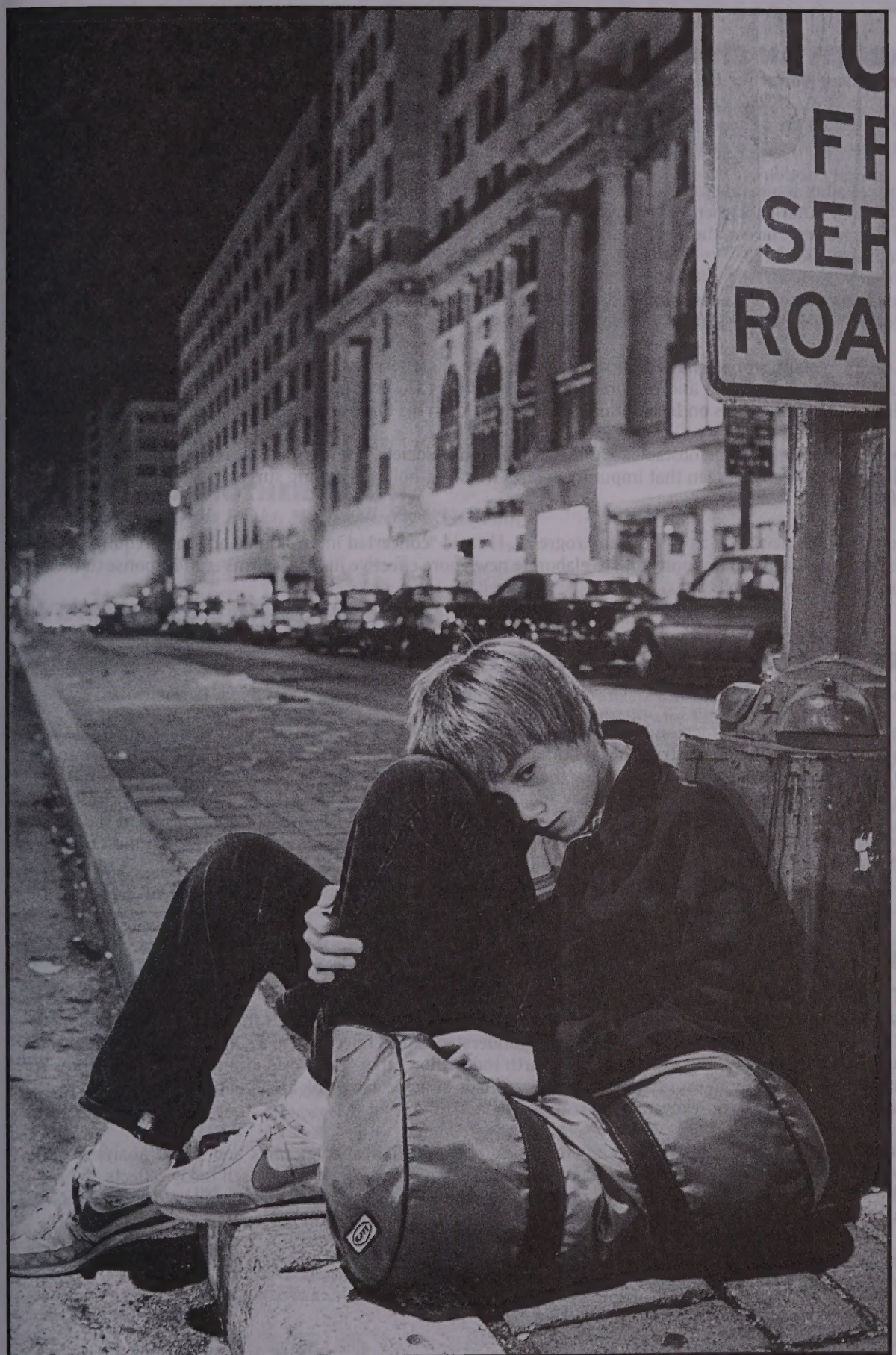
Beyond the seven cities, churches and groups everywhere engaged in substantial work in peacebuilding are invited to participate in the ***Peace to the City*** campaign.

If you recognize your church or group in this description, please let us know. Testimonies, witnesses, stories, reports and descriptions of projects and programmes will be brought together at the WCC's Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, giving shape, we hope, to a bold ecumenical commitment to overcome violence beyond 1998.

To apply for inclusion in the ***Peace to the City*** campaign, please write to the:

WCC Programme to Overcome Violence
Attention Ms Salpy Eskidjian
150 route de Ferney
PO Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
E-mail: sal@wcc-coe.org
fax: +41 22 791 0361)

In your letter, please describe your involvement with peacebuilding in terms of the **issues** you deal with, **who** you work with, and whether you are involved with or relate to the **local churches** (if any).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WCC PUBLICATIONS

IMPUNITY: AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

By Jerry L. Van Marter for ENI.

Impunity - the failure to bring people to justice for the crimes they have committed - is the subject of a new book published by the World Council of Churches.

"Impunity is a hot issue in many places in the world where the needs for justice come up against the need for political stability," Charles Harper told journalists at a press conference in Geneva launching the book, *Impunity: An Ethical Perspective.* Harper, the book's editor, directed the WCC's Human Rights Resources Programme for Latin America from 1973- 1992.

The book is comprised of six case studies drawn from Latin American countries - Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia and El Salvador.

"These deeply moving stories and analytical studies have been gathered as a resource for people in other regions facing similar social, political and pastoral challenges," writes Dwain Epps, executive secretary for the WCC's Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), in his foreword to the book.

The practice of impunity is "an obstacle to full reconciliation in society," Harper said. "It is also a question of mental health, because we have seen that impunity creates worse pathologies among survivors than the original tortures of the guilty."

Epps described the new book as "a work in progress". He said "concerted international action is required to improve existing standards on impunity and to elaborate new, more effective judicial norms ... in response to the cry of the peoples: 'Never again'!

WORK IN A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

IN THE ECUMENICAL REVIEW, VOLUME 48, NUMBER 3, JULY 1996.

In June 1995, some forty women and men came together at the Château de Bossey near Geneva to discuss economic growth, environmental destruction and unemployment questions under the theme "Work in a Sustainable Society". The meeting was jointly organised by the Visser't Hooft Foundation, the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey and the WCC Programme Unit on Justice, Peace and Creation. This issue of *The Ecumenical Review* includes a selection of the papers that were presented and discussed at the consultation, approaching the issues at stake from different perspectives. Authors of the articles are: Francis Wilson, Larry R. Kohler, Lukas Vischer, Joannes S. Petrou, Amata Miller, Hans Opschoor, Mariama Marjorie Williams, Maria Mies, José Ricardo Ramalho, András Csanády and András R. Csanády Jr, Marc Lenders, Dagmar Heller, Thomas F. Best.

EARTH COMMUNITY, EARTH ETHICS,

Larry L. Rasmussen.

This is a book about "environmental ethics" from a Christian perspective, although the author warns at the outset that the term "environment" is misleading if one understands it to refer only to a surrounding world separate from ourselves. For, he says, the situation of the earth today shows that "the world around us is also within. We are an expression of it; it is an expression of us. We are made of it; we eat, drink and breath it... This is not so much 'environment' as the holy mystery of creation."

Creatively interweaving insights from religion, ethics, natural science, economics and social analysis, Larry Rasmussen demonstrates how the ecological predicament in which the world finds itself today reflects and reinforces a wide range of crises that afflict contemporary society. Yet he also argues that, despite all the "bad news", there is still reason to hope - "a healing and sustaining power that runs deep in life itself".

The above mentioned books can be ordered from WCC Publications,
PO Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland, Fax: +41-22-798.13.46

PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

THEOLOGY FOR EARTH COMMUNITY: A FIELD GUIDE,

edited by Dieter T. Hessel.

This book is part of the Orbis Series Ecology and Justice. The essays in this book evolved from carefully crafted papers that were prepared for and discussed at an October 1994 conference on "Theology for Earth Community". That gathering at Union and Auburn Theological Seminaries in New York was attended by 125 teachers, students of theology, and church leaders. Its overall objective was to identify leading edges of theological scholarship focused on the environmental challenge and to identify an agenda for the fields of theological education and areas of religious leadership, in order to develop appropriate teaching and effective ministry.

All of the authors of the chapters were asked to address two questions, suggested as their organizing framework:

1. What writings and themes in this field of theology, or area of religious study and leadership, especially help to foster understanding of and engagement in the environmental challenge?
2. What new theological work and approaches to "eco-justice" teaching/leadership are most needed to engage the deepening crisis of earth community?

While some chapters answer these questions more directly than do others, this guide to theology for earth community does scout out the terrain so that many more can join the journey.

Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, USA, 1996. ORBIS/ISBN 1-57075- 052-1.

DEFENDING MOTHER EARTH,

Jace Weaver ed., Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, USA, 1996.

See George E. Tinker's article page 19

WOMEN RESISTING VIOLENCE: SPIRITUALITY FOR LIFE

edited by Mary John Mananzan, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Elsa Tamez, J. Shannon Clarkson, Mary C. Grey, Letty M. Russell.

It was a historic event when forty-five women theologians from fourteen countries convened in San Jose, Costa Rica, on December 7-12, 1994, to have a dialogue on the theme Spirituality for Life: Women Struggling against Violence. This was the culmination of a process which started in Geneva in 1983, when the Women's Commission of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was established. This book includes the keynote addresses and the papers on the different forms of violence against women of this memorable event. Violence against women must be viewed in the context of the atmosphere of violence in society. The many forms of violence were thus elucidated in panel discussions that were stimulated by a topic paper on a particular form of violence and a theological reflection on it.

Published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 10545, USA, 1996. ORBIS/ISBN 1-57075- 080-7.

Copies of ECHOES can be ordered from the Unit III publications office at the WCC. The average cost of producing and mailing ECHOES is of US$ 5 (equivalent to SFr 7.-) per copy. Readers who can afford it are strongly encouraged to contribute. However, **please note** that any contributions under SFr 20.- (US$ 15.00) actually costs us more to cash than it is worth.

Individuals willing to express their commitment to the Unit III for Justice, Peace and Creation may also contribute in the same way.

Please make payment either by cheque in the name of the WCC or to the following bank accounts with a very clear mention that it is for ECHOES magazine, Unit III:

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Account No. 0690-0988974

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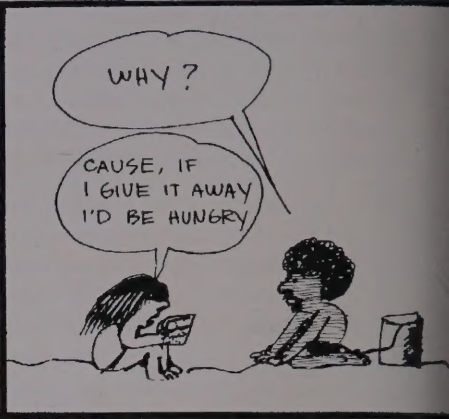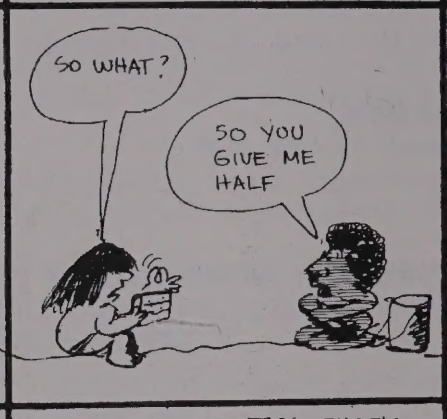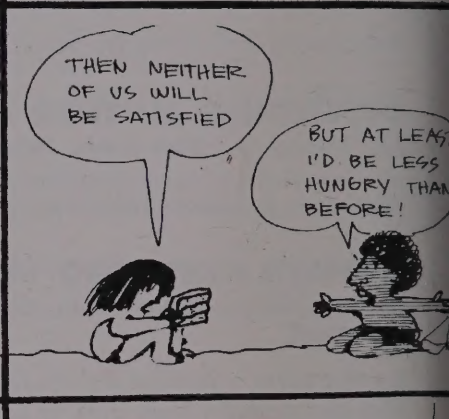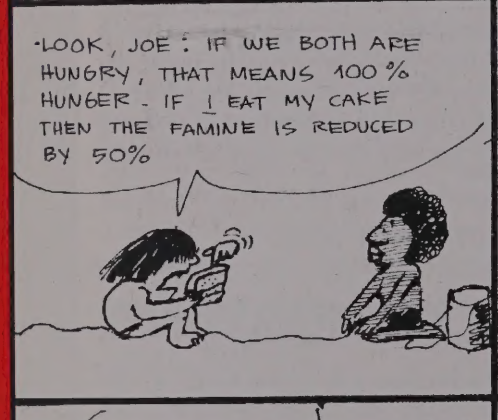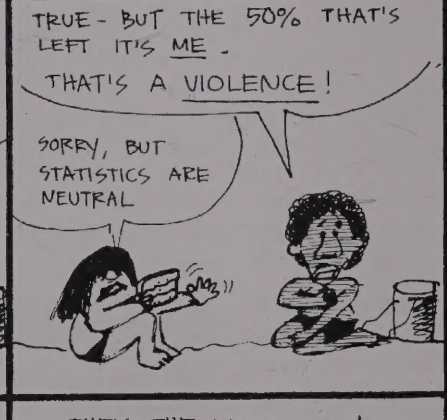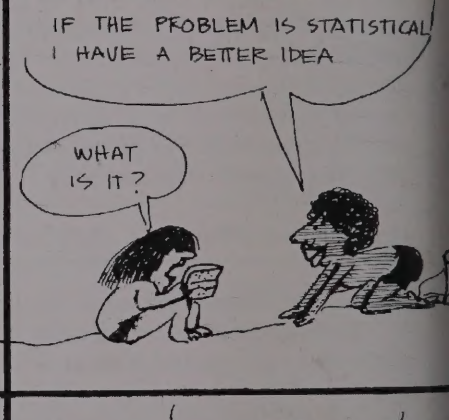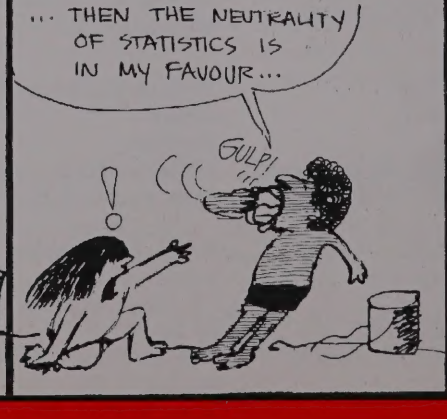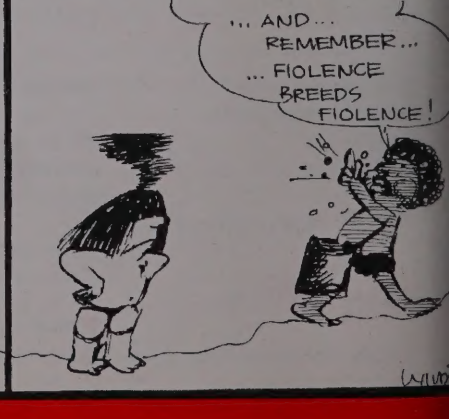
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